

1. Sara Went Shopping

Sara Smith, a Pasadena resident, went shopping. She is 30, and has lived at 3037 N. Foothill Street since 1992. Sara has been married to John for seven years. They have two children; Bob is five years old and Nancy is three. Sara owns a 1995 four-door blue Toyola. At 9 a.m., Sara got into her car and drove to Barget, a department store a mile away.

Barget was having a holiday sale. Sara bought a four-slice toaster for \$29.95 plus tax. The regular price was \$39.95. She paid by check. On her way home, Sara stopped at MilkPlus to buy a gallon of nonfat milk. The milk was \$3.50. Sara got 50 cents back in change.

Sara arrived home at 10 a.m. John and the kids were still sleeping. She woke them up and then made a hot and nutritious breakfast for everyone.

2. Man Injured at Fast Food Place

A 79-year-old man was slightly injured on Saturday while waiting in his brand new convertible in a drive-through lane at Burger Prince restaurant. Herman Sherman of Northville suffered a mild burn about 9:00 p.m. when a young female employee accidentally spilled a cup of coffee into his lap. Sherman said the coffee was hot but not scalding.

He refused medical aid, saying the only problem was the stain on his slacks, but it would wash out. He was given a fresh refill. Before Sherman drove off, the restaurant manager, John Johnson, gave him two free gift certificates--one for an extra-large coffee and one for the restaurant's newest sandwich, the McRap.

The employee, who was a new hire, was let go later that evening. She was quite upset. She said she would probably sue Burger Prince for letting her go. She said it was the man's fault for ordering something that she might be able to spill.

3. A Life-Saving Cow

Six consecutive days of spring rain had created a raging river running by Nancy Brown's farm. As she tried to herd her cows to higher ground, she slipped and hit her head on a fallen tree trunk. The fall knocked her out for a moment or two. When she came to, Lizzie, one of her oldest and favorite cows, was licking her face. The water was rising. Nancy got up and began walking slowly with Lizzie. The water was now waist high. Nancy's pace got slower and slower. Finally, all she could do was to throw her arm around Lizzie's neck and try to hang on. About 20 minutes later, Lizzie managed to successfully pull herself and Nancy out of the raging water and onto a bit of high land, a small island now in the middle of acres of white water.

Even though it was about noon, the sky was so dark and the rain and lightning so bad that it took rescuers another two hours to discover Nancy. A helicopter lowered a paramedic, who attached Nancy to a life-support hoist. They raised her into the helicopter and took her to the school gym, where the Red Cross had set up an emergency shelter.

When the flood subsided two days later, Nancy immediately went back to the "island." Lizzie was gone. She was one of 19 cows that Nancy lost. "I owe my life to her," said Nancy sobbingly.

4. Driver Loses Mabel, Finds Jail

A fifteen-year-old boy was injured in a car accident when the minivan he was traveling in was hit by a pickup truck at an intersection. The boy was taken to a nearby hospital. The paramedics said that it appeared that the boy had nothing more serious than a broken left leg, but that internal injuries were always a possibility. The boy was conscious and alert. His mother, who was driving, was uninjured. She said that the truck appeared out of nowhere, and she thought she was going to die. She turned the steering wheel sharply to the left, and the truck hit her minivan on the passenger side.

The driver of the truck was a 50-year-old man who was unemployed and apparently had been drinking—police found 18 empty beer cans inside the truck. The man denied drinking, but he failed the police test for sobriety. When asked to touch his nose with his arms outstretched and eyes closed, he was unable to touch any part of his head.

The handcuffed man asked the police if they knew where "Mabel" was as he was put into the back seat of the police vehicle. The police asked him if Mabel was his wife. He said, "She's my dog, my dog! Where's my baby?" A dog with a collar, but no identification, was found minutes later, half a block away. The man was taken to the city jail and booked on suspicion of driving while intoxicated and on causing an accident.

5. Jerry Decided To Buy a Gun

Jerry Baldwin was 30 years old. He was the manager of a pizza restaurant. He lived in an apartment about one mile north of the restaurant. He walked to and from work. When it was raining, he took the bus.

Jerry loved gangster movies. When a new one came out, he would go to the theater and watch the new movie three or four times. Then, when it went to video, Jerry would buy the video at Barney's Video Store. Jerry had a home collection of over 1,000 gangster videos. Old ones, new ones, color, black and white, English, Spanish, Japanese--he loved them all. He could tell you the name of the movie, the director, the stars, and the plot. Did you say you liked "Pulp Fiction"? Well, Jerry would rattle off all the details of that movie. And then he would invite you to his place to watch it some time. He was a nice guy.

Jerry finally decided that he would like to own a gun, just like the gangsters. So he saved his money for a couple of years. Then he went to a gun store and bought a used .38 caliber revolver for \$300. While there, he also bought a couple of boxes of ammunition. The following Saturday morning, he went to the gun club to practice with his new revolver. He was in the club for only 10 minutes when he accidentally dropped his pistol. The gun went off, and the bullet went into Jerry's right knee.

Jerry now walks with a limp and a cane, just like some gangsters.

6. Freeway Chase Ends at Newsstand

A 24-year-old Los Angeles man was taken to a hospital and then to county jail after leading police on a one-hour freeway chase in a stolen SUV. The chase ended in downtown Los Angeles in front of the Spring Hotel. Most of the chase was uneventful, except for an empty bottle of whiskey that the driver threw at one police vehicle.

When the driver got into downtown, things started to happen. He ran over a fire hydrant. The water spewed out of the hydrant, causing a geyser that ruined all the books in several carts that a vendor had put outside to attract customers into his bookstore. The driver hurriedly turned west onto Grand Avenue and managed to bang into three parked cars on one side of that street and two cars on the other side. The driver also tried to run over a police officer, who was standing in the crosswalk ordering him to halt.

Turning north, the driver caused a bus to slam on its brakes to avoid a collision. The bus was empty, and the bus driver was uninjured. However, two police cars that were pursuing the SUV from different directions were not so lucky. One of them ran into the front of the bus, and the other into the back. Because the drivers had braked early enough, the damage to their cars was minor. Both officers resumed the chase.

They only went two blocks north to find that the SUV had come to a full stop because it had plowed into a newspaper stand. The driver, who was not wearing a seatbelt, was slumped behind the steering wheel. The proprietor of the newsstand was yelling at the driver and shaking a magazine at him. The police called for the ambulance. They charged the driver with failure to yield to a police officer and driving under the influence.

7. Better To Be Unlucky

Sam, an unemployed piano tuner, said it was only the second thing he had ever won in his life. The first thing was an Afghan blanket at a church raffle when he was 25 years old. But this was much bigger: it was \$120,000! He had won the Big Cube, a state lottery game. To win, a contestant must first guess which number a spinning cube will stop on. The cube has six numbers on it: 1X, 10X, 50X, 100X, 500X, and 1000X. If he is correct, the contestant must then guess which of two selected variables is going to be greater. So, just guessing which number appears on the cube does not guarantee that you will win any money.

Sam correctly guessed 1000X, but he still had to choose between two variables. One variable was the number of cars that would run the stop sign at Hill Street and Lake Avenue in six hours. The other variable was the number of times that a teenage boy would change TV channels in a three-hour period. This was a tough decision.

Finally, Sam flipped a coin. It came up heads, so Sam picked the teenager. He picked right. The stop sign was run only 76 times, but the teen clicked 120 times. Sixty-year-old Sam jumped for joy, for he had just won 1000 times 120, or \$120,000. Sam dreamily left the lottery studio. Talking excitedly on his cell phone while crossing the street, he got hit by a little sports car.

Sam is slowly getting better. He was in the hospital for a month. His hospital bill was \$110,000. And the insurance company for the little sports car's owner sued Sam for \$9,000 worth of repairs. Also, Sam still has to pay federal taxes on his winnings. Sam doesn't play the state lottery any more. He says it's better to be unlucky.

8. Food Fight Erupted in Prison

Inmates released two correctional officers they had held for a week in the tower at the state prison complex. The inmates captured the officers a week ago after the two officers tried to quell a food fight in the main dining room. The food fight erupted when the prisoners discovered that their candy ration had been cut in half. The candy is a popular bartering item. Inmates trade it for cigarettes, cigars, magazines, stationery, legal dictionaries, and other items. Prison officials said it was necessary to cut back on this luxury item in order to provide basic items, like soap and razors and toilet paper.

The prisoners went berserk over the reduction. They threw food, plates, and silverware at the doors, windows, and guards. Then they grabbed two guards and hauled them up to the tower. Once they had the tower door secured, they sent messages to prison officials demanding big bags of candy in exchange for sparing the guards' lives. The warden complied with their demands. After a week of negotiations, the prisoners approved a deal which restored their candy ration, but in return the administration said they would have to reduce daily soap allotments by 75 percent.

9. Wanted To Know How His Pig's Doing

Two mayors made a bet on the outcome of the Vegetable Bowl, the annual football game between their high school teams. If Arvada's team lost, the mayor of Arvada would send the mayor of Boulder ten pounds of sliced potatoes, ready for frying. If Boulder's team lost, the mayor would send ten pounds of sliced tomatoes, ready for sandwiches or salads.

Unfortunately, before the game started, the mayor of Boulder overheard the Arvada mayor tell someone: "They grow the worst tomatoes. If they lose and send us their tomatoes, I'm going to give them all to my pig." The mayor of Boulder was upset to hear this, because he thought Boulder's tomatoes were the best in the state. So he gave the matter some thought.

The following week, the big game was played. Boulder lost its star quarterback in the first half when he tripped over a cheerleader and sprained his big toe. The quarterback glumly watched the rest of the game from the bench. His team ended up losing, 38 to 12. The two mayors shook hands after the game, and the Arvada mayor said, "I'm really looking forward to those tomatoes." As the Boulder team left the stadium, some unhappy fans threw ripe tomatoes at them.

A week later, the mayor of Arvada received a package of beautifully sliced tomatoes. He took them straight to his pig, which gobbled them right up. That night the mayor of Boulder asked his wife if Arvada's mayor had called. "No," she said. "Why?" "Because I mixed a pint of hot sauce into the tomatoes and I wanted to know how his pig's doing."

10. Goats Being Hired

Goats are being hired to do the work of men in a neighborhood just outside of San Diego. The fires that occurred in Hillborough four years ago destroyed thirty homes, most of which have been rebuilt. While contractors were rebuilding the homes, nature was regrowing the grasses, bushes, and shrubs. The area is now so overgrown in brush that it again poses a major fire hazard.

The city council asked for bids to remove the brush. The lowest bid they received was \$50,000. And that was if the city provided breakfast and lunch for the work crews for the six weeks it would take to clear the overgrown area. The city countered, offering unlimited coffee (black only) and a doughnut a day for each crew member. When that offer was rejected, the city asked for help on its website.

A shepherd in Montana and a goatherder in San Bernardino read about the city's plight while surfing the web on their laptops. They both offered to do the job for \$25,000. The council chose the goatherder because he lived closer. When told that the city dump was overflowing, the goatherder said, "No problem. My goats will eat everything in your dump. Except for the automobile engines, of course." So, for another \$5,000, the city killed two birds with one stone. If all goes well, they will invite the goatherder and his "family" back every three years. The goatherder said he will probably visit San Diego while his goats are in the dump. "I want to take one of those hang-glider rides. I just hope we don't crash. My goats would miss me a lot," he said.

11. A Missing Cat

The owner of a missing cat is asking for help. "My baby has been missing for over a month now, and I want him back so badly," said Mrs. Brown, a 56-year-old woman. Mrs. Brown lives by herself in a trailer park near Clovis. She said that Clyde, her 7-year-old cat, didn't come home for dinner more than a month ago. The next morning he didn't appear for breakfast either. After Clyde missed an extra-special lunch, she called the police.

When the policeman asked her to describe Clyde, she told him that Clyde had beautiful green eyes, had all his teeth but was missing half of his left ear, and was seven years old and completely white. She then told the officer that Clyde was about a foot high.

A bell went off. "Is Clyde your child or your pet?" the officer suspiciously asked. "Well, he's my cat, of course," Mrs. Brown replied. "Lady, you're supposed to report missing PERSONS, not missing CATS," said the irritated policeman. "Well, who can I report this to?" she asked. "You can't. You have to ask around your neighborhood or put up flyers," replied the officer.

Mrs. Brown figured that a billboard would work a lot better than an 8"x11" piece of paper on a telephone pole. There was an empty billboard at the end of her street just off the interstate highway. The billboard had a phone number on it. She called that number, and they told her they could blow up a picture of Clyde (from Mrs. Brown's family album) and put it on the billboard for all to see.

"But how can people see it when they whiz by on the interstate?" she asked. "Oh, don't worry, ma'am, they only whiz by between 2 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. The rest of the day, the interstate is so full of commuters that no one moves." They told her it would cost only \$3,000 a month. So she took most of the money out of her savings account and rented the billboard for a month.

The month has passed, but Clyde has not appeared. Because she has almost no money in savings, Mrs. Brown called the local newspaper to see if anyone could help her rent the billboard for just one more month. She is waiting but, so far, no one has stepped forward.

12. Book Him

A man accused of failing to return more than 700 children's books to five different libraries in the county was released from jail yesterday after a book publisher agreed to post his bond of \$1,000. The publisher said, "There's a story here. This is a man who loves books. He just can't let go of them. He hasn't stolen a single book. So what's the crime? We think that Mr. Barush has a story to tell. We plan to publish his story."

When asked why he didn't return the books, Mr. Barush said, "Well, how could I? They became family to me. I was afraid to return them, because I knew that kids or dogs would get hold of these books and chew them up, throw them around, rip the pages, spill soda on them, get jam and jelly on them, and drown them in the toilet."

He continued, "Books are people, too! They talk to you, they take care of you, and they enrich you with wisdom and humor and love. A book is my guest in my home. How could I kick it out? I repaired torn pages. I dusted them with a soft clean cloth. I turned their pages so they could breathe and get some fresh air.

"Every week I reorganized them on their shelves so they could meet new friends. My books were HAPPY books. You could tell just by looking at them. Now they're all back in the library, on the lower shelves, on the floors, at the mercy of all those runny-nosed kids. I can hear them calling me! I need to rescue them. Excuse me. I have to go now."

13. Water Under the Sink

The 36-year-old bachelor ate his usual lunch at home. He had an apple, a ham sandwich with a sliced dill pickle, a bowl of chicken noodle soup with a couple of soda crackers, and a small candy bar, all washed down with an eight-ounce glass of milk.

After he finished breakfast, Ed put everything in the sink, poured a little dishwashing soap onto a Teflon pad, and scrubbed the soup bowl, the sandwich plate, and the milk glass. Then he switched on the garbage disposal to grind up the few bits of food that he had scraped off his plate. He left the kitchen to go brush his teeth. But he felt something wet on his bare foot. Sure enough, he looked down and saw some water on the kitchen carpet. "What is this?" he said aloud.

Opening the cabinet door under the sink, he saw no dripping water. He went to the closet and got a flashlight. When he shined the light into the cabinet under the sink, he saw drops of water on the sides of the dark blue steel cylinder. It looked like he had a leaky garbage disposal. To test his theory, he turned on the switch, and a stream of water flowed out of a seam onto the cabinet floor and then onto the kitchen carpet. Ed had a problem, but he didn't have time to fix it now. He had to run some errands. He put some tape over the switch so he couldn't accidentally turn the disposal on again.

14. Water Under the Sink

Ed came home from his errands and put the groceries into the cupboard and the refrigerator. He grabbed a flathead screwdriver and a pair of pliers from his toolbox. In the kitchen, he got down on his hands and knees and turned on the flashlight. After a couple of minutes of looking, he decided what to do. He had never opened up a disposal before, but there is a first time for everything.

The cylindrical disposal was about 7 inches in diameter and had a horizontal seam dividing the top half from the bottom half. The halves were held together by three screws. Ed jiggled the bottom half of the disposal; it was loose because two of the three screws were corroded. Only one screw was still doing its duty. Ed unscrewed it.

The bottom half of the disposal was now lying on the cabinet floor. Ed thought for sure that it would be full of months-old food, but there was no food, only a hardened, torn, useless gasket. The next day Ed went to the hardware store to buy some screws and a new gasket. The employee told him that they did not carry those gaskets and suggested that he write to the manufacturer. Ed returned home. He created his own gasket by using gasket sealant that comes in a tube. He applied the sealant, screwed the two halves back together, and crossed his fingers.

The next day he turned on the water and switched on the disposal. When he saw the water pouring out of the seam, Ed knew one thing: it was time to buy a new disposal. The good thing was that new disposals started at \$79. The bad thing was that it would have to be installed by a plumber. Plumber rates started at about \$80 an hour. Ed decided that since the disposal used a lot of energy and the world needed to use less energy, from now on he would put his scraps into the kitchen garbage bag. He reminded himself to tell everyone at work tomorrow about how he was now helping to solve the world's energy problems.

15. Theft Occurs Everywhere

An elderly woman told the police that, as she entered a restroom, she was jostled by a woman behind her. A few minutes later, as she was about to pay for a moustache remover at a nearby store, she discovered that her wallet was missing from her purse. Apparently the woman who had bumped into her had cleverly stolen her wallet. This type of theft is called pick-pocketing.

Perhaps an even more personal kind of theft is known as housebreaking, or burglary. After such an intrusion, the victims often report a feeling of violation. They seldom regain the comfort and security level they used to have in their home. They constantly feel like they are being watched; they feel that if they go out, the burglars will again come in. They feel uncomfortable when they are home, and they feel uncomfortable when they aren't home.

Burglars get lucky or make their own luck. Sometimes homeowners forget to lock all their windows or doors. Sometimes burglars will break a window, cut through a screen door, or force open a side door.

Thieves have no shame. They will steal from anyone that they think is vulnerable. Of course, that means the elderly are their frequent victims. Some thieves are very clever; some are very lucky. All of them make an honest person's life more difficult. It's too bad that all of them can't be caught and converted into honest people.

Imagine that: a world with no larceny, a world where you can park your bicycle unsecured on the sidewalk, or leave your purse unattended in your shopping cart. Is this only a dream? Some say that if you can dream about it, it can happen.

16. Eggs and a Bunny

Easter Sunday was a cloudy but festive day in Memorial Park for about 100 kids from local orphanages. An Easter egg hunt started at 10 a.m. when a fire engine blasted its horn. Boys and girls, ranging in age from 2 to 6, dashed throughout the park, yelling and screaming, walking and running, and quite often, falling down. One little girl, Amanda, found her first egg less than a minute after the horn blew. Instead of putting it into her basket and continuing to search for more, she sat down. Then she spent the next 10 minutes examining it, unwrapping it, and eating it piece by piece. When she finished, she put the wrapper into her basket, wiped her hands on her white dress, and went to hunt for another egg.

Meanwhile Jeff, one of the older boys, filled his basket to overflowing. He asked one of the firemen to hold it for him, and then took off running for more candy eggs. As soon as he found some, he put them into the basket of the child closest to him. Two little toddlers both saw a candy egg at the same time, and they both bent over to pick it up. They banged heads, and both of them sat down bawling. A couple of volunteer nurses picked them up and told them that everything was going to be all right.

By 11 a.m., the search was over. Most of the kids were studying their candy, exchanging it with others, or eating it. But then the fire engine horn blasted again, causing three-year-old Jenny to cry. A fireman on a bullhorn told everyone to gather around, because a special guest had arrived.

Once everyone was settled, the Easter Bunny climbed down out of the fire engine. The bunny was 6'6" tall. Most of the kids cheered and ran toward him. Even Jenny stopped crying for a moment. She stared at the bunny and at all the kids running toward the bunny; then she started crying even harder. The Easter Bunny hugged the kids, and they hugged him. Then the Easter Bunny sat on a fire engine step, and one by one the kids came up, sat on his lap, and got their pictures taken. After that, the older kids were allowed to explore the fire engine itself.

The festivities ended about 3 p.m., when the orphans climbed into the buses for the return trip home. Most of them said they had a fun time. Six-year-old Sara asked, "Can we do this every Sunday?" And more than one boy asked, "Can I drive the fire engine next time?"

17. Hotel Says Goodbye to Clean Couple

Theodore, the manager of the Paradise Hotel, told a middle-aged couple that they would have to leave the hotel after just one night. The couple, visiting from Texas, had booked a room for eight nights.

"They wanted a sterile environment," Theodore said. "They should have rented a room in a hospital, maybe an operating room. This hotel is clean, but it isn't that clean."

Theodore said that, on the very first day, the couple brought all the sheets, pillowcases, and bedspreads down to the main lobby and just dropped them next to the front desk. They stood there next to this pile of bedding while other guests looked, pointed, and murmured. The hotel got three cancellations within the hour from people who witnessed this strange event.

When Theodore asked the couple what the problem was, they said that their bedding was filthy and they wanted it replaced. The couple could not identify any specific "filth" on the bedding. The wife just said, "We're paying good money to stay here. How dare you doubt us? We know the filth is there. That's all the proof you need." Theodore called room service, and the bedding was replaced immediately.

Early the next evening, however, the couple marched to the front desk again and demanded seven cans of spray disinfectant. "We need a can for each night. We have to spray the phone, the TV, all the door handles, the toilet handle, the shower stall, the faucet, the sink, and any hotel staff entering our room."

Worried about what their demands might be in the following days, Theodore politely suggested that a hotel more suitable for them was just around the corner. He then called ahead to reserve a "very clean" room, and gave them free transportation in the hotel limousine.

"They seemed surprised that I suggested a different hotel, but they liked the idea that I didn't charge them for the second day, and they really liked the limousine service," said Theodore.

18. \$100 Deposit

The well-dressed, gray-haired woman was crying her eyes out. She had just been fined \$100 by the judge because a month ago her dog made a mess on the front lawn of the courthouse.

"I just got out of the cab and I leashed Poopsie to the light pole. After I paid the fare and gave the driver a dollar tip, I turned around and saw that Poopsie had made a mess. I didn't have any plastic bags, so I said, 'Well, Poopsie, let's go home. There's nothing I can do about this now.'

"We were just starting home when I heard this voice out of nowhere: 'Excuse me, ma'am. Is that your dog?' I turned around. It was an officer of the law. Well, of course, it was my dog. 'That dog just made an illegal deposit on the courthouse lawn. As its owner, it's your responsibility to dispose of that deposit. See the sign over there? I'm going to have to write you a citation.'

"I asked him what sign he was talking about. He pointed all the way down to the end of the block. One little sign, a block away! How could anyone see that? I couldn't see that sign with my best opera glasses. The officer said that I could fight the ticket. He said the judge was a nice old man who owned four dogs. So I said, 'OK, thank you, I'll fight the ticket.'

"So when I went to court, I dressed Poopsie up in his prettiest ribbons and made extra sure he did his business first. We were both so excited. I just knew the judge and Poopsie would hit it off.

"But do you know what happened when we got inside? They had a different judge, a judge who is allergic to dogs, and he immediately started sniffing, coughing, sneezing, and looking around. And then he yelled at me to get the dog out of the courtroom. He fined me \$100 on the way out without even giving me a chance to talk about Poopsie's chronic dyspepsia. It was terrible! I'm still upset."

19. Books Don't Grow on Trees

A local community college professor decided to fight back. "The price of books for our students is just getting higher and higher and, combined with the rising cost of tuition, it's killing these kids," said Peter Jason, Ph.D. "Remember, students are one of the poorest groups of people in America. Almost half of them have at least one part-time job. In fact, one of my students has three jobs. She is a part-time sales clerk at a clothing store three days a week, then works three evenings a week as a pizza cook, and on weekends she does manicures at a beauty salon. And she still manages to have a high GPA and go to school full-time."

Textbook prices are traditionally high. Adding to that problem, many college instructors change textbooks year after year; they either upgrade to a new edition or switch to an entirely different textbook. This further hurts students because if an instructor no longer uses a particular textbook, that book has no resale value.

Dr. Jason decided to make life a little easier and a lot cheaper for his students by writing his own book on public speaking. "Many books have an increased price because of bells and whistles: CD-ROMs, lots of color photographs, and lots of graphics. I talked to my students, and many of them, like me, prefer to keep things simple. So, during a sabbatical a few years ago, I wrote my own textbook. I made sure that it wasn't long-winded. I called it Successful Public Speaking: How To Be Brief, Concise, and to the Point.

"Compared to most other public speaking primers, mine is half the number of pages, and one-third the price. That is, \$30 instead of \$90. Plus, it is published in a three-ring binder format. So, when I wrote a second edition last year, students only had to buy the 35 new pages and delete 35 of the original pages. For only \$7.00, they had upgraded to the new edition. I've had great feedback from my students about this loose-leaf concept. Maybe the word will get out, and more writers and publishers will try it."

20. A Murder-Suicide

A man and a woman died in an apparent murder-suicide last night in Altadena. The man was 74-year-old Dominic Vittorio. The woman was his 70-year-old wife, Victoria. The couple had been married for 50 years. In fact, their 50th anniversary occurred just a month ago, according to their next-door neighbor, Mrs. Allen. The couple was childless and had no close friends. Mr. Vittorio was a retired carpenter who had emphysema and was blind in one eye because of a cataract. His wife was a diabetic who had already had one foot amputated because of complications from the disease. Her eyesight was almost completely gone.

"They were such a nice couple," said Mrs. Allen. "I've lived next to them for the last 20 years or so. I'm widowed, and Dom always used to help me with things like changing light bulbs and fixing appliances. They had no kids, but they were always friendly to the neighborhood kids. Every Halloween they handed out tons of candy and fresh fruit. But about eight years ago Vicky came down with diabetes, and things just haven't been the same for her or Dom. They used to be so friendly and full of life, and then they just seemed to get quieter and quieter.

"She used to come over to my place once or twice a week, and we would talk about all kinds of things and have the nicest time. But that happened less and less as she got sicker. So I would go over to her house about once a week and we would talk. But the conversations steadily got shorter, and she seemed to lose interest in listening and in talking. She didn't say it, but you could tell she was in a lot of pain."

Mrs. Allen said she hadn't even talked to either of the Vittorios in almost a year. They never came out. Even food was delivered to them by a local agency. She said she heard two gunshots last night—"It scared me half to death!" She immediately called the police. "Such a sad ending for such nice people," she said. "Together in sickness, but alone in the world."

21. City Welcomes New Store and Its Owners

The city of Armada opened its arms to a new business on Huntington Drive at First Street. The store, called Turtle Dove, is a pet shop specializing in two kinds of animals. The owners are two brothers, Bill and Bob Pidgin. They moved here from the northern California town of Santa Rosa, where they owned an ant farm store called Antimal House. That store was such a success that after five years they sold it for a big profit.

They took it easy for a couple of years, traveling throughout the states. "We visited almost every zoo in the country, partly because we love animals and partly because we were looking for inspiration for our next business," said Bill. They finally decided on turtles and doves. "They're easy to feed and care for, and both animals live a long time," said Bob.

The store will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays. "We think those are hours that our customers will find very convenient. Plus, the three days off gives us a chance to go into the woods and find more critters. We never buy our animals; we always try to collect them from the wild. That way we can pass on huge savings to our customers. And, of course, by removing these animals from their natural habitat, we protect them from being devoured by their natural enemies. So our customers are happy, our animals are happy, and we're happy. It's a win-win for all of us."

22. Mayor Denies Hit-and-Run Charge

The mayor of Sacrapinto, J.K. Choi, 35, was charged with hit-and-run driving last night by the town sheriff. A freshly killed calf was discovered lying in the middle of Arlington Drive at about 10:00 p.m. A witness, 20-year-old Emily Parker, said she saw the car hit the calf and keep going. She didn't see the driver but she did recognize the hood ornament on the car—a pair of bull horns.

"Oh, yes," Emily said, "I know that's the mayor's car. It's the only car in town with bull horns on the hood." Asked how she could see the bull horns at night, she replied, "Oh, didn't you know? A couple of months ago the mayor got his horns neonized, so they have this soft purple glow at night. They're really cool-looking."

The sheriff drove over to the mayor's house, which is about five miles from city hall, and found the mayor washing his 1972 Kadillac. He asked why the mayor was washing his car so late at night. "Because that's when there's no hot sun that causes the car to dry so fast that you have sun streaks. Don't you know anything, sheriff?"

The sheriff pointed out that one of the horns was broken at the tip. "When did that happen?" he asked. "When did what happen?" Choi asked. "Oh, good grief! I never even noticed that! Do you know how expensive these horns are? They don't grow on trees, you know. I wonder if I can find the missing piece and superglue it back on."

The sheriff then showed the mayor the tip of a bull horn. "Do you think this is the missing piece?" The mayor was astounded. He looked at it, turned it over in his hands, and then placed it on the horn, where it fit perfectly. "That's fantastic, sheriff! Thank you so much! Where did you find it?"

"Where did I find it? It was next to Farmer Brown's calf that you killed back there about an hour ago." The mayor's mouth dropped open. "Calf! What calf? What are you talking about? I had no idea. I thought I hit a speed bump. What was his calf doing out in the middle of the road in the middle of the night?"

"We'll settle this in court. I'm an innocent man. By the way, get that calf over to Lester's butcher shop right now. We'll have us a big barbecue tomorrow at city hall. And don't forget to invite Farmer Brown. I know he'll forgive me after he tastes Lester's world-famous rib eye."

23. Gasoline Prices Hit Record High

Residents of southern California are trying to get used to skyrocketing prices for gasoline. The average price for 87 octane economy gas is \$2.22, almost 30 percent higher today than it was 12 months ago. The lowest gas price in the Southland right now is \$2.09 a gallon at the Seashell station in Arcadia. The station manager, Everett, said the reason his gas is cheaper than elsewhere is that he bought a lot of gas two years ago at reduced prices, so he is passing his savings on to his customers.

The lines at the Seashell station often run 10 to 20 vehicles long. The police have been here several times because cars block traffic on Horsetrail Drive. Everett said, "I tell people in line that the Barco station a block away is only \$2.14, but they'd rather wait and save 5 cents. It's OK with me, of course. I don't mind making money."

A young man pumping gas said he had waited in line for 20 minutes. When asked why he didn't go a block away where there were no lines, he said, "Every penny counts. When I bought this '99 Bummer, gas was only \$1 a gallon, which was pretty cheap. So, even though I only get eight miles per gallon, I wasn't paying that much to fill my tank. But today's prices are killing me. I drive to work, and I drive to the grocery store. That's it. I used to drive around the neighborhood just to show off my wheels, but I can't do that any more."

24. A Festival of Books

People joke that no one in Los Angeles reads; everyone watches TV, rents videos, or goes to the movies. The most popular reading material is comic books, movie magazines, and TV guides. City libraries have only 10 percent of the traffic that car washes have. But how do you explain this? An annual book festival in west Los Angeles is "sold out" year after year. People wait half an hour for a parking space to become available.

This outdoor festival, sponsored by a newspaper, occurs every April for one weekend. This year's attendance was estimated at 70,000 on Saturday and 75,000 on Sunday. The festival featured 280 exhibitors. There were about 90 talks given by authors, with an audience question-and-answer period following each talk. Autograph seekers sought out more than 150 authors. A food court sold all kinds of popular and ethnic foods, from American hamburgers to Hawaiian shave ice drinks. Except for a \$7 parking fee, the festival was free. Even so, some people avoided the food court prices by sneaking in their own sandwiches and drinks.

People came from all over California. One couple drove down from San Francisco. "This is our sixth year here now. We love it," said the husband. "It's just fantastic to be in the great outdoors, to be among so many books and authors, and to get some very good deals, too."

The idea for the festival occurred years ago, but nobody knew if it would succeed. Although book festivals were already popular in other US cities, would Los Angeles residents embrace one? "Angelenos are very unpredictable," said one of the festival founders.

25. Crazy Housing Prices

Homebuyers nationwide are watching housing prices go up, up, and up. "How high can they go?" is the question on everyone's lips. "As long as interest rates stay around 5 percent, there's no telling," remarked one realtor in Santa Monica, California.

"It's crazy," said Tim, who is looking for a house near the beach. "In 1993, I bought my first place, a two-bedroom condominium in Venice, for \$70,000. My friends thought then that I was overpaying. Five years later, I had to move. I sold it for \$230,000, which was a nice profit. Last year, while visiting friends here, I saw in the local paper that the exact same condo was for sale for \$510,000!"

It is a seller's market. Homebuyers feel like they have to offer at least 10 percent more than the asking price. Donna, a new owner of a one-bedroom condo in Venice Beach, said, "That's what I did. I told the owner that whatever anyone offers you, I'll give you \$20,000 more, under the table, so you don't have to pay your realtor any of it. I was tired of looking."

Tim says he hopes he doesn't get that desperate. "Whether you decide to buy or decide not to buy, you still feel like you made the wrong decision. If you buy, you feel like you overpaid. If you don't buy, you want to kick yourself for passing up a great opportunity."

Everyone says the bubble has to burst sometime, but everyone hopes it will burst the day after they sell their house. Even government officials have no idea what the future will bring. "All we can say is that, inevitably, these things go in cycles," said the state director of housing. "What goes up must come down. But, as we all know, housing prices always stay up a little higher than they go down. So you can't lose over the long run. Twenty years down the road, your house is always worth more than you paid for it."

26. Happy and Unhappy Renters

Samantha, like many renters, is tired of renting. One reason is that her annual rent goes up like clockwork. Every year her landlord raises the rent five percent. Another reason is her neighbors. "New neighbors always seem to be more inconsiderate than the ones who moved out," she said. "My first neighbor was a door-slammer; I always knew when he came home or left home. After he moved out, a saxophonist moved in. A saxophonist! He practiced two hours a day. On Saturday his friends would come over and I'd get to listen to a whole band. I called the police, but they said saxophone playing is permitted in apartments for up to four hours a day, because saxophone playing is job-related. They told me I was lucky that the guy was only playing two hours a day!"

There are many unhappy renters, but there are also happy renters. "I've been lucky my whole life," said Howard, a middle-aged man. "My neighbors couldn't have been any better if I had picked them myself. One neighbor was a chef. He'd bring me the best leftovers in the world. Another neighbor was a pianist. She played the most delightful music. Another neighbor was a mechanic who did my tune-ups and changed the oil in my car. My latest neighbor is a birder; we go birding every weekend with our binoculars."

Different persons have different attitudes. Samantha saw the saxophone player as irritating, yet Howard saw the piano player as delightful. Millions of people would be happy just to have a roof over their head. Yet there are millions who would complain that their roof is the wrong color.

27. Pulling Out Nine Tons of Trash

A work crew consisting of 150 volunteers worked for eight hours in a light drizzle on Saturday to clean Carson Creek of almost nine tons of debris. "A job well done," smiled Alan Specter, the director of the event. "We're scheduled to come back here one more time, three years from now. Of course, we hope that there won't be nine tons of garbage next time."

The garbage came in all shapes, sizes, and colors: cans, bottles, bicycles, car tires, auto batteries, sofas, furniture, clothing, shopping carts, bowling balls, plastic bags, dolls, baby carriages, TV antennas, and portable radios. There was even a golf bag with a full set of golf clubs.

Much of the backbreaking work was done by two community groups—the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, and two environmental groups—Save the Bay and Watch the Whales. Concerned retirees and volunteers from police and fire departments assisted. Everyone was issued boots, gloves, and rain gear. The work occurred along a two-mile stretch of streambed. The debris was hauled roadside, where trucks lined up to take the trash to the landfill. More than 500 big yellow trash bags were filled.

No one found anything of great value, although a five-year-old boy found an earring that he thought might be worth a million dollars because it was so shiny. He said he would sell it. Then he would donate half of the proceeds to Watch the Whales, and use the other half to buy a triple-scoop ice cream cone every day for the rest of his life.

28. Cloning Pets

A company in Phoenix, Arizona, says that it can now clone your cat. "Actually," said Felix Lee, President of Twice Is Nice, Inc., "you don't even have to wait until your beloved cat dies. We already have clients whose clone lives with its donor."

The price is steep. A clone of your cat will cost \$50,000. First, your veterinarian must do a biopsy of your cat. This is sent to TwIN, Inc., where it is cultured to grow fresh new cells. These new cells are stored in liquid nitrogen until you notify TwIN, Inc., that you are ready for the clone. At this time, you pay half the amount (\$25,000). A cultured cell is implanted into a female cat that is in estrus, and if all goes well, a kitten is born about 60 days later. The new kitten is weaned in about eight weeks. TwIN, Inc. delivers the kitten to you after it receives the remaining \$25,000.

"We are a growing company," said Lee. "Our facility can handle about a dozen births a year now, but our goal is to produce about 50 kittens and 50 puppies a year." The company is currently experimenting with stray dogs. Some canine clones seem to be perfect, but some have been bizarre. Nevertheless, Lee believes that they will be successfully cloning dogs in about a year.

29. Rentals at the Oceanside Community

The oceanside community of Lozano Beach is debating whether to allow homeowners to rent out their homes on a weekly basis during the summer. Such rentals produce high incomes for the owners and the city, which gets part of this income through a 15-percent surcharge to the owner. "This can be a boon to our coffers," said Rick Brown, city manager. "In the summer, homeowners can bring in \$2,000 a week or more."

However, these rentals can also be a can of worms. The city stopped allowing weekly rentals 10 years ago because of the problems they were generating. Two, three, or even four families would pile into a two- or three-bedroom house. Then they would park their cars on the lawn and produce huge amounts of trash. Sometimes they would toss this trash on the streets and sidewalks.

Noise would be another problem. Some people would party late and loud every night. This abuse created a lot of friction with neighbors and resulted in extra work for city maintenance crews and for police, who had to respond almost hourly to residents' complaints about noise, music, trash, and parking problems. But now, the city's budget problems are making it reconsider its ban.

City officials will hold a community meeting next week to listen to the pros and cons. One official has already suggested a proposal. He thinks that a fine might work. If the city has to respond to complaints, the homeowner will be charged \$200 per response. Such a fine might cause the homeowner to be careful to rent only to people that he is sure will be considerate of the neighbors. The city would still get 15 percent of the rental fee, even if the homeowner's rent were totally offset by fines. The city would post inconsiderate renters' names on the city website so that other homeowners would know about them.

Some officials think the ban should be continued because these visitors to the community have already proven that they have no consideration for others. Their money isn't worth the headaches they cause.

30. Trees Are a Threat

The mountain town of Canton is at an elevation of 6,000 feet. It is surrounded by thick underbrush and pine trees. Because of six years of drought, these plants are a major fire hazard. Thousands of trees and tons of underbrush are going to be removed over the next five years at a minimum cost of \$3 million. The brush will be removed first, then the trees will be toppled and removed. A cleared nonflammable area will then safely surround the town of 4,000.

Residents look forward to the work, because it will help their town survive a future inferno. "But there are two problems," said one resident. "All the extra trucks are going to make traffic pretty bad. Once the area is cleared, we have to make sure dirt bikers don't try to make the cleared area their personal playground."

A recent fire burned 4,000 acres and destroyed 11 homes in nearby Hamilton. The fire was raging toward Canton, but a sudden rainstorm put it out. Residents know that they won't get lucky twice, so they are looking forward to this massive clearing operation.

Ninety percent of the cutting and clearing will be paid with federal funds. Unfortunately, if the trees are on private property, they must be paid for by the residents themselves. Prices can range as high as \$1,000 to cut and remove one tree. Officials say that residents can apply for state and federal loans if necessary.

"Well, what good does that do me?" asked Thelma, a 65-year-old widow. "I'm living on social security. I've got four trees on my property. The government's not going to loan me money when they know there's no way I can pay it back. So what am I supposed to do? These planners with all their big ideas ought to think of the little people."

31. Gets Booked, Writes a Book

A man convicted of writing bad checks to casinos has written a book that he predicts will become a national bestseller. Entitled A Casino Is Born Every Minute, the 250-page book details James Duncan's successful and unsuccessful attempts to beat casinos. Duncan is serving a five-year sentence for grand larceny in the Las Vegas city jail. He wrote 18 bogus checks, ranging in value from \$3,000 to \$10,000, at 17 different casinos. "My only mistake was cashing that last check at the same casino I had cashed the first check at," said Duncan. "They were waiting for me."

Duncan only has a few months left before he is released from the jail. During his incarceration, he used the library facilities and computers to write his book. He completed the book two months ago and is now shopping it around to various publishers.

Books about gambling and casinos are very popular. People like to read about gangsters, beautiful women, flashy cars, posh hotels, and the exciting possibilities of winning it all and losing it all. Duncan says he was the first card-counter in Las Vegas. He claims that he made almost \$1 million at blackjack. Then, other card sharks started copying his technique.

"They abused the system," said Duncan. "They got greedy. If they'd been like me, and just won some here and there, different places, and different nights, the casinos wouldn't have gotten suspicious so fast." When the casinos realized what was going on, they started using two or more decks at the blackjack tables to thwart the counters. They escorted out anyone they suspected of counting cards.

32. Popular Park Reopens

The Silas Lake Park reopens today after being closed for six months. The park was closed because mud and rock slides destroyed part of Cambridge Road, the only access into the park. "We had to remove tons of boulders and rocks," said Hugh Foster of the Parks and Recreation Department. "Then we had to rebuild a bridge and reconstruct almost a mile of highway. I'm really surprised we got it done so soon."

The park is three miles north of Colfax on Highway 28. Cambridge Road is a two-lane highway that winds upward through Pearl Canyon before it descends to Silas Lake, which has about 20 miles of shoreline. The largest lake in the county, it is also famous for bass. In fact, the record largemouth bass catch in California occurred here in 1975. A 14-year-old boy caught a 19-pound bass.

The lake has two ramps for boaters, a full-service restaurant, a snack bar, a small tackle store, and a boat rental facility. As with all county parks, no alcohol is sold or permitted. More than 100 picnic tables have protective roofs and big barbecue pits. There are public restrooms with free shower facilities, lots of trash cans, and hiking trails for nature lovers. The west side of the park includes a softball field, a soccer field, and two volleyball courts. Horseshoes and kite-flying are two other popular activities. In the summer, a designated swimming area has a lifeguard on duty seven days a week.

The entry fee is \$10 per vehicle and \$10 per boat. Reservations are not accepted. The parking lot holds about 500 vehicles; if it is full, no additional vehicles are allowed to enter. Latecomers either leave or wait in line for someone to leave the parking lot. Some weekends there are three dozen vehicles waiting in line outside the gate. Because of many requests, park officials soon might start permitting campers to stay overnight on weekends.

The park is open from dawn to 10 p.m. during the summer. "We probably average 2,000 people here every day during the summer," said Foster. "They come here to fish, swim, water-ski, jet-ski, picnic, commune with Mother Nature, you name it. People love this place."

33. Swim Classes Begin Soon

Summer is almost here, which means it is time to sign your kids up for swim classes again at the Community Pool. Classes begin on Monday, May 1, and will continue throughout the summer. Fifteen swim classes are being offered. Each class lasts ten hours. A new class starts each week of the summer. Each class costs \$20. The pool is big enough for six students per class.

Classes will increase in difficulty each week. The first week is for children up to six years old. The last week is for advanced swimmers who want to improve their race and endurance skills.

Students can sign up for as many classes as they like, but they must pass the skills level test. For example, students who sign up for Level 4 (Stroke Readiness) must show their certificate for completing Level 3 or must demonstrate the front crawl and backstroke. Children cannot sign up for a level they are not ready for. Children who have never attended Community Pool classes must show up April 29 or 30 for a swim skills evaluation. Instructors will rate the students and assign them to a particular skill level.

Swim classes are fun for all. Children learn new skills and make new friends. Parents get to meet other parents in the community. Swimming, like bicycling, is a healthy and valuable skill that, once learned, is never forgotten.

"It's a joy to teach young children," said Ginger, the lead instructor for swimming programs. "More than half of them are terrified when we put them into the water the first time. Two months later, they're begging their parents to go to the pool every day."

34. Getting Older But Not Sitting Around

All seniors 55 and older are invited to a special meeting next Tuesday in the Senior Center. The meeting will begin with cookies and lemonade. The speaker will be James Carter, the director of a nonprofit organization dedicated to making the golden years fun and interesting.

"We have too many seniors who act old because they think they're old," said Carter. "Our goal is to help seniors realize that they're as young and active as they want to be. Getting older does not mean sitting around waiting to die. It means getting out and doing all the things you never had time to do while you were working and raising a family."

Carter will identify the services and activities that are available to seniors locally and statewide. Included are legal aid, tax advice, discounts for bus and taxi travel in the city, and free blood pressure testing on the first Monday of each month. Testing for diabetes and for cataracts is offered four times a year for a nominal fee. The city also provides inexpensive dinners called Meals on Wheels. Volunteers deliver these meals to seniors who are homebound because of illness or injury.

An Internet class begins this month for seniors who want to visit the World Wide Web. "Many seniors still use typewriters," said Carter. "They see no need for a computer. But after they take this course, some of them may decide to buy their own laptops."

New activities at the Senior Center include Bingo on Friday and Saturday nights, with a grand prize of \$50 each night. The center is also offering Strength Training classes. "As you get older," said Carter, "you need to keep both your mind and your body active. An active mind helps prevent Alzheimer's, and an active body helps prevent osteoporosis."

35. Agencies Get Millions for Homeless

The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development has awarded \$5 million to three different local nonprofit organizations. The money will be distributed over a four-year period and is aimed at helping approximately 1,000 homeless people in the county of Arvada.

One agency, with headquarters in Woodbridge, is slated to receive \$1.5 million. The agency director says that they will focus their resources on educating the homeless. "We will probably build another school-home with this money," he said. "A school-home is exactly what it sounds like. It is a school and a home. We have already built four school-homes throughout the county. We get the homeless off the street, and we educate them so they don't have to return to the street. We teach them how to be auto mechanics, plumbers, landscapers, painters, carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, and air-conditioning repairmen.

"You wouldn't believe the success that we have had. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, our office air-conditioning went out. My secretary called a repairman. The repairman was one of our first homeless students. He now owns his own air-conditioning business, plus two houses, two cars and a boat! He has a dozen employees. Holy cow! He's doing better than I am. He fixed our air-conditioning for free. I think I might sign up for the air-conditioning class myself."

36. Tenants Watch Building Burn

A 20-unit apartment building burned for about an hour before firemen were able to extinguish it. The fire started in the attic at about 10:30 p.m. yesterday evening. The damage was estimated at \$1.5 million. A fire department spokesman said the fire might have been set deliberately.

The tenant who first saw the blaze banged loudly on the door of every unit in the building. Occupants of 15 units were already in bed or preparing for bed. No one responded in the other five units because the tenants were not home. Those tenants who were home escaped with nothing more than the clothes on their backs, their pets, their cell phones, and their laptops.

Many tenants went across the street to watch the fire from a safe distance. They were all hoping that their units would be spared. Some of the pets were so disturbed by the noise, crowds, flames, and smoke that their owners could not hold on to them. They clawed their way out of their owners' arms and dashed away. The younger children were similarly frightened. They cried in their parents' arms.

Two fire engines arrived at 10:45 p.m., but the entire roof was ablaze by then. Smoke and flames were visible in most of the units on the top floor.

At about 11:35 p.m. the flames were extinguished. Most of the roof had disappeared. The top floor of the two-story building was about 80 percent gone. Water was seeping into the ground-floor units, ruining most of them. The tenants were crying or speechless. They were happy to be alive, but now they had no home. Where were they going to live?

Firemen discovered a charred gasoline can in the attic. This was the second suspicious apartment fire in a month.

37. Bathtub Blues

A middle-aged man with a long beard was arrested by the police for disorderly conduct and property damage. "More charges might be added later," said a police officer.

The man, identified as Bill Wild, checked into the Motel Five last night about an hour after sunset. Telling the clerk that he would be staying four nights, he paid cash in advance. He then asked her where a grocery store was. She said that the nearest grocery store was John-Johns, which was only two blocks away.

The police said that Wild went to John-Johns and purchased three gallons of honey and four gallons of chocolate syrup. The checker asked him what the occasion was. He replied, "I'm trying to become a sweeter person." The checker smiled at the joke.

Wild drove back to the motel. He opened all seven containers and poured them into the bathtub. He added warm water to the mix. Then he placed his boom box on the bathroom floor next to the tub. He tuned the radio to an opera station. He got undressed, hopped into the tub, and started singing loudly with the music.

Fifteen minutes later, the lodgers in the room next door phoned the clerk. She banged on Wild's door, but he kept singing. She phoned his room, but he didn't answer. Then she called the police, who arrived quickly.

"Well, at least he paid in advance," said the clerk. "That money will help pay for the plumber." The bathtub drain was completely clogged. The tub remained full of chocolate and honey.

"You just never know about people," said the clerk. "He seemed so nice and friendly. Who'd have thought he was a bathtub-singing nut?" The police said this was the third time that Wild had been arrested for this kind of behavior.

38. Blood Drive at Civic Center

The local university blood center had a blood drive today at the Civic Center auditorium. Almost 300 people showed up, but about 50 were turned away for various medical reasons. Fifty others left because the lines were moving so slowly. The event concluded at 6 p.m., three hours after the scheduled close. It was a long day for everyone—administrators, nurses, and donors. But there were plenty of chairs and tables, and many people brought their own books, magazines, or newspapers.

The first thing the donors had to do, of course, was fill out the donor registration and screening form. When they finished filling out the form, they waited until a nurse called them to her desk. The average adult body contains 8 to 12 pints of blood. Donors can give one pint at a time. It takes your body 2 to 4 weeks to replace this amount. Most donors filled up the pint bag within 5 to 10 minutes.

Before leaving, the donors received a sheet of instructions including: Do not lift any heavy objects for 12 hours. Leave your pressure bandage on for 2-3 hours. Do not smoke for at least 30 minutes. Avoid alcohol for the rest of the day. Do not do any strenuous activity for 24 hours.

"I wish I could hug and kiss all the volunteers that are here today," said Martha, the blood center donor recruiter. "Many donors underestimate the importance of what they're doing. They think it is no big deal, but it is a big deal. Their blood is actually saving lives, helping other people to live. We cannot thank them enough for that, nor can the recipients."

39. City Hosts 42nd Art Fair

The Fernwood Library sponsored Fernwood's 42nd Art Fair this weekend. The three-day event was held, as usual, at Memorial Park. Almost 100 artists showed up each day. More than 1,000 locals and visitors strolled through the shady park daily, as temperatures remained in the comfortable 70s all weekend.

All kinds of art were on display and for sale. Prices ranged from a couple of dollars to a couple of thousand dollars. Oscar, a native of Peru, was selling his beautiful paintings of the mountain village of Ayacucho, where he lives most of the year. "Every year I come to the United States to sell my paintings at about five different art shows. Then I return to my country. That is where I do all my paintings, in our beautiful mountains."

Peter is a photographer. He travels throughout the southwest US. One of his favorite areas is northeast Arizona. "That's where Spider Rock is," he said, pointing to a beautiful color photograph of a towering sandstone spire about 800 feet high. This rock, according to Navajo Indian lore, was the home of Spider Woman, a goddess revered by the tribe.

A Navajo woman was selling her own rug weavings at the fair. She was busy creating a rug while visitors watched. When asked how long it took, she replied that her creations usually took months. She said that Navajo tradition was to always weave a slight flaw into an article so as not to offend Spider Woman, because only Spider Woman could create a perfect weave.

The exhibit areas were located throughout the park. Artists' creations included jewelry, ceramics, bird houses, gourd art, furniture, pottery, handmade musical instruments, music CDs, and sculpture. Almost all the artists had their work displayed beneath shady canopies.

"This was another successful year for our art fair," said the head librarian. "The artists sold enough of their work to encourage them to return next year, and the library raised almost \$700 from sales of various items. We'll use this money to purchase a few more tables and chairs."

40. City and Crime

Crime in the city of Clio hit a 30-year low last year. "This is absolutely wonderful for our citizens, our businesses, and our visitors," said Police Chief Louis Gates. Clio has a population of 28,000, but it has at least 30 gangs. The gangs make most of their money from dealing drugs and offering "protection." They also commit violent crimes, such as murder, battery, and rape.

There were 1,486 thefts last year. Most of the thefts involved cars. Thieves also robbed the people at gunpoint or pickpocketed them. They broke into houses and businesses at the alarming rate of two a day two years ago, but that rate was down to only one a day last year. "That's a 50-percent decrease in one year," beamed Gates. "I think the officers deserve a big pat on the back. Even better, maybe they'll get that 10-percent raise that they are all hoping for next fiscal year."

Citing an example of how the police force has helped reduce crime, Gates talked about bicycle thefts. "For years and years, kids were locking up their bikes at bike stands in front of schools, libraries, and malls. About 10 percent of the time, the kids would come out of the school or wherever and discover that their bike was no longer there. Someone had cut the lock and stolen their bike. We wracked our brains trying to find a solution to this problem. Finally, at the beginning of last year, we hit upon it. We simply removed most of the bike stands. Then the bicycle theft rate came down quickly."

Most cities in the state have similar problems. They all involve too many people, too much crime, too few police, and too little funding. These problems are part and parcel of civilization everywhere. They might diminish, but they will probably never disappear. All people can do is hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

41. Bank Robbery

It was 80 degrees in the shade. A man wearing a heavy army jacket, a pullover wool cap, and dark sunglasses walked into the First American Bank at the corner of Maple and Main streets in downtown Short Beach.

The man walked up to the teller and held up a hand grenade for all to see. He said, "Give me all your money, all the money in this bank, right now!"

Everyone in the lobby screamed and started running, even the security guard. Nervously, the young female teller handed the man three big bags loaded with cash. He walked out the door. A second later, one of the money bags exploded, covering him with red dye. He yelled in pain and surprise, and started pacing around in circles because he couldn't see where he was going.

He couldn't see, but he could hear. He heard the police siren get closer. Then he heard the police tell him to get down on his stomach on the sidewalk and put his hands behind his back. They handcuffed him and placed him in the back of the police car.

Seeing the hand grenade on the sidewalk, the police told everyone to get back. They sealed off the whole block and called the bomb squad. The bomb squad came and examined the hand grenade. Then they laughed. They told the police it was a fake. The hand grenade was actually a harmless dummy, something a 12-year-old might play with.

The police chuckled. The bank employees returned to work. The bank customers returned to their lines. The bank robber, hopefully, would never return.

42. Immigration Goes Online

Thousands of immigrants who need to file papers related to immigration status, green cards, and resident cards no longer have to stand in line for hours on end. The immigration office now has a new system called Info Pass. Applicants simply schedule a time and a date to meet with an immigration officer using Info Pass. They don't even have to go to the immigration office. Info Pass is a website that they can access on their home computer or a library computer.

To beat the crowds, immigrants in Los Angeles used to get in line the night before. They would start lining up outside the building at 6:00 p.m. and spend the night in the cold or, occasionally, in the rain. By the following morning, there might be 200 people in line. This, of course, was an unpleasant surprise to people who thought they were early birds by arriving at 7:00 a.m. Sometimes people would sell their place in line to others for \$50 or more.

Where there are lines, there are vendors. No one had to worry about going hungry in line because of the variety of hot and cold food and drinks being sold all night long. Occasionally the police received reports about people being pickpocketed while waiting in the overnight lines. But such reports were rare. Many immigrants prefer not to get involved with police for fear of being sent back to their native country.

With the new system, people with appointments are in and out of the building within an hour. Applicants show up 15 minutes before their appointment time. Things are so efficient now that about 120 applicants per hour can be processed through the immigration office. Before Info Pass, it was about 40 people an hour.

43. Jimmy Fixes His Door

Jimmy lives on the second floor of a six-unit apartment building. His front door has two locks -- a security deadbolt, and a regular door handle lock. The front door also has a peephole -- a tiny piece of glass through which Jimmy can look out his door at about eye-level to "preview" who is knocking on his door or ringing his doorbell.

The peephole is a security device, but Jimmy never uses it. When someone knocks, he just opens the door. First of all, he lives in a safe neighborhood, so security is not really a problem. Second, people rarely knock on Jimmy's door, so he is always eager to greet a visitor.

Before you can knock on the front door, you have to push the button on the black screen door to open the screen door. The screen door has an inside lock on it, but the lock has not worked since the screen door was installed more than two years ago. This has bothered Jimmy from day one. Today, Jimmy finally decided to do something about the lock on the screen door. It was a nice, warm sunny day. Jimmy was in his shorts -- no flip-flops, no shirt.

The lock was part of the screen door pushbutton handle. The outside and inside handles were held together with just two screws. Jimmy got a flathead screwdriver and loosened both screws. He kept adjusting the screws, and pushing on the outside button. Eventually he adjusted the screws enough to where the lever stayed in the locked position when he pushed on the outside button. Finally, he had made the right adjustment.

But now he needed to put a spacer on the inside handle to maintain that adjustment. He found a piece of plastic that was just the right thickness. He inserted the plastic between the handle and the doorframe itself, and then he tightened the two screws. Bingo! It worked perfectly. He could push on the outside button with all his might, and the lever would remain locked. Jimmy grinned. The screen door finally worked properly!

Jimmy had fixed a two-year-old problem in less than an hour. He was ecstatic. He returned the screwdriver to the toolbox, thinking "I'm a genius."

44. Larry Needs a New Air-Conditioner

It had been another hot spring day. By ten o'clock in the evening, it had only cooled down to 87 degrees, according to Larry's thermometer in the living room. He rarely looked at his thermometer because he usually didn't care what the exact temperature was.

Larry had two table fans in his bedroom. Because of the high temperatures, the last three evenings had been "two-fan" nights. He used his air-conditioner only occasionally. During one month the previous summer, he had used the air-conditioner 10 days consecutively, day and night. His electric bill that July, normally about \$30, was \$77.

But Larry figured that, once in a while, using the AC wouldn't kill him. So that evening at 11:30, just before he went to bed, he turned on the AC. He set the thermostat to 72 degrees. He woke up four hours later when he heard a big bang, which sounded like two cars had run into each other on the street outside. But it wasn't two cars. It was the AC capacitor on the roof; it had just blown up. Larry's air-conditioner was officially dead.

Two circuit breakers had switched off, so he switched them back on. Larry had already suspected that there was something wrong with his air-conditioner. He called Jack, the repairman, but Jack didn't show up until four days later because he was so busy repairing all the other air-conditioners in the neighborhood.

When Jack finally came, he climbed up on the roof. Larry heard a lot of banging. Twenty minutes later Jack told Larry, "You need a new air-conditioner. Yours is the original model that came with this apartment building. All the other original AC units have been replaced. Yours lasted longest, but now it's kicked the bucket. I'm going to call your landlady to see if she will approve a new AC unit for you. It's going to cost \$1200 parts and labor."

"Wow," said Larry.

Jack said that if everything went as planned, he'd install a new unit Monday morning. "Until then," he said with a smile, "stay cool."

Larry said, "No problem," but he wondered if he should drive to the thrift store to look for a third fan for his bedroom.

45. Man Gets 12 Years for Fraud

A federal judge sentenced Bruce Jones to 12 years in federal prison for fraud. Over a 10-year period, Jones had managed to swindle almost \$10 million from thousands of gullible people throughout the state.

He advertised his fantastic ideas on TV. "For some reason," Jones said, "TV seems to break the ice. Even though you are a total stranger to the viewer, once he sees you on TV in his home, he feels like he knows you. You enter his living room and become a trusted friend."

Jones had an imagination that wouldn't quit. One time he showed viewers an "official government" earthquake report which "proved" that the western half of California would collapse into the sea within three years. For \$100, he said, Jones would insure your house and property for full value. Thousands of people who saw that TV ad sent him a hundred dollars each.

In another TV ad, Jones claimed that he had negotiated with the federal and state government for exclusive air rights. He told viewers that, for only \$100, they could own the first 10 miles above all their property. You would be able to charge any commercial plane that flew over your property \$100 per crossing. You would also be able to charge government rockets, satellites, space shuttles, and space stations \$100 for each and every violation of your air rights.

Another time, Jones claimed to have invented a product that gets rid of calories. He showed the viewers a spray can of "NoCal." He said that by simply spraying NoCal on your food, a chemical interaction would cause all the calories in the food to simply evaporate within about 10 seconds. The NoCal was only \$10 a can. As usual, Jones received thousands of checks in the mail.

The judge told Jones that he should be ashamed of himself. Jones responded that he was very ashamed of himself, and that when he got out of prison he hoped to become a TV consultant to help people avoid getting scammed. He told the judge that he was already developing an instructional CD that, for merely \$100, would save people thousands of dollars in scams. The judge nodded, and then changed Jones's sentence from 10 years to 12 years.

46. Man Shoots Up Post Office

A 36-year-old man stormed into the Ramona post office yelling at everyone to get out of his way. Carrying a shotgun, he climbed up onto the countertop and told everyone to lie on the floor. Then he pulled the trigger and fired a round into the ceiling. Plaster splattered onto the floor and the customers.

The man ordered all the customers and employees to sit up and look at him. He said, "Repeat after me: I hate the post office!" Everyone repeated the words. He fired another round, but this one he aimed at the front plate glass window. Shattered glass went everywhere.

Three minutes later, five police cars pulled up in front of the post office, lights flashing and sirens wailing. Using a bullhorn, a police officer told the man to walk out backwards with his hands up. The man fired another blast out the shattered window. The police officer and his bullhorn were uninjured. However, one police car had three little pit marks in it.

The man yelled, "I'm not coming out until the post office pays me for pain and suffering. A postal truck ran into my car two years ago. My back is killing me. I can't work anymore. My wife left me. I can't take it anymore."

After a while, the man calmed down. He released all the people inside. At 7:00 p.m., the man walked out backwards with his hands up. The police handcuffed him, put him in the back seat of the car, and drove him to the police station.

A post office official said that they had tried to settle with the man out of court, but he refused anything less than a million dollars. "So the whole thing went to court," he said. "I guess he got tired of waiting for the trial to begin. He'll probably go to jail for a few years because of this stunt."

47. Murals Are Over 200 Years Old

Two men chanced upon a trap door in a back room of a historic church near San Francisco. They discovered 23 religious murals painted by Native Americans more than 200 years ago. The murals record scenes from the Bible. Arthur Anderson, an artist, and Eric Bush, a painter, had been to the church many times before. But they were not aware of any trap doors in the building.

The only reason they discovered it was that Arthur dropped a coin onto the floor while pulling a small knife out of his pants pocket. He heard the coin hit the floor and roll. He started searching. A minute later, he found his dime. "Gotcha!" he said proudly. But then he saw what looked like an unusual gap in the floor board. With his knife, he began digging around the gap.

The floor board suddenly loosened. Arthur felt that he was onto something. He removed the floor board and saw a rope handle attached to what looked like a trap door. Eric helped Arthur remove four more floor boards. Then Arthur slid open the trap door.

Beneath it was a hole in the ground about 15 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 2 feet deep. They shined a flashlight into the hole and saw the murals. They were not wrapped, covered, or otherwise protected. Yet they were in wonderful condition, according to Eric.

"God truly does work in mysterious ways," said Arthur. The murals use only the colors black, red, and yellow. The smallest are about 12 by 12 inches, and the biggest are about 24 by 24 inches. Digital photographs were taken of all the murals before they were loaded onto a truck.

All 23 murals, created about 1791, are now at the Museum of Native American Art. They will be inspected, cleaned, archived, and examined by experts. They will not be put on public display until early next year. Museum officials expect a huge turnout when that day occurs. "This is truly rare," said one official. "I wonder how many more treasures are out there waiting for someone to drop a dime on them."

48. Pier Collapses

The Oakville pier collapsed Saturday afternoon at 3:30. Although hundreds of people were on the pier at the time of the collapse, no one was killed and only 15 people were injured. One person was seriously injured. That person was a 43-year-old man who suffered two broken legs, eight broken ribs, and a punctured lung.

Hundreds of people gathered around to watch the rescue efforts. Three local television stations and two radio stations broadcast live from the pier. The collapse occurred after a big rig went out of control Saturday morning and slammed into one of the main supports for the pier.

"The driver reeked of booze," said a police officer who had written the truck driver a ticket for driving under the influence. "He was so drunk that he didn't even apply his brakes before he crashed into the support. It's a miracle that he didn't kill someone," said the officer, who took the driver to jail.

City officials said it was too early to get a complete damage estimate, but that repairs to the pier would probably cost at least \$500,000 and take a month or more. The local business people are very unhappy because the repair process will significantly reduce consumer purchases for the summer season.

"We make 80 percent of our annual profits from June through September," noted one T-shirt vendor. "This is going to hurt."

49. Cameras in Police Cars

The Rockford police chief and some city officials want to install video cameras in all 100 police cars. They think this will reduce the number of lawsuits filed against the city. In the last five years, Rockford has paid out more than five million dollars to settle about 40 lawsuits.

The chief said, "If cameras had been in those cars, we wouldn't have had to pay one dime. We're always pulling over drunks or drug users who try to fight the cops or shoot them. Then they always claim that the police started beating them first or started shooting at them first. What hogwash!"

The cost of installing cameras will be about \$500 per vehicle. The city council will vote on the proposal next Monday. Ten of the 13 council members, when asked about the proposal, said that they liked the idea. One member said that it makes good fiscal sense and common sense. If the cameras are approved, they can be installed in all the cars within six weeks.

The police officers enthusiastically support camera use. One officer said that too many people think the police are liars; cameras would show citizens that police tell the truth. "The money that we've been spending on lawsuits will be better spent on more cameras," said one officer.

Citizen reaction to the idea of police car cameras is mixed. One person said that the police should have started doing this years ago when video cameras were invented. But an elderly man said that cameras were an invasion of privacy. "These police are trying to stick their nose into everything," he said. He was going to attend the council meeting to condemn the proposal. He hoped that other citizens would join him.

50. A School Girl Sues Her School

A straight-A student got a C in cooking class and didn't like it. She didn't like it so much that her dad filed a complaint in federal court about it. He alleges that the teacher, who is white, discriminated against his daughter, who is black. He seeks to have her grade changed from a C to an A and asks for unspecified financial damages.

Virginia Brown is in the ninth grade at Ashley High School. Since her first year in school, she has had perfect attendance and all her grades have been A's. Virginia's father said her heart was broken when she got the C.

"She cried the whole weekend," he said. "She wouldn't come out of her room. Her eyes were red and puffy. My little girl hasn't been this upset since her cat got run over by a car when she was 6 years old."

Virginia is a model student. She's the class president. She's on the swim team, the volleyball team, and the track team. She belongs to the chess club. She is a member of the Girl Scouts and sings in her church choir.

The home economics teacher is 28-year-old Jessica Smith. This is her first year teaching. Ms. Smith said that discrimination was absolutely not the issue. "Some of my best friends are African-Americans," she said. "This isn't a black and white problem. Everybody in America wants to sue everybody else. I'm going to sue them for defamation of character and whatever else my lawyer comes up with."

The school principal, who grew up in India, said that he supported Ms. Smith 100 percent. He said that Virginia is an excellent student who would have no problem getting into the best universities even with a C in cooking. "She won't have any difficulty finding a great university, but she might have problems finding a husband," he laughed. "She'd better look for a man who likes to eat out a lot."

51. SUV Driver Sends Officer Flying

About 2:00 a.m. Monday, a California Highway Patrol officer was hit by an SUV. The officer was thrown about 10 feet before landing in a hedge. The officer was assisting a motorist whose car had stalled on the freeway.

The police officer was listed in stable condition at a nearby hospital. The accident occurred after the fast-moving white SUV drove onto the shoulder where the two cars were parked. The SUV struck the officer before plowing into the police car. The driver of the stalled car was unhurt.

The SUV rolled completely over. The driver climbed out of the SUV and took off, running in the direction of a nearby off-ramp. Because another police vehicle was nearby, the police caught the driver quickly. He was charged with drunk driving, property damage, causing personal injury, and leaving the scene of an accident.

The driver had no license and no insurance. He had been convicted a year ago of driving while intoxicated. At that time he had also injured someone and also fled the scene. He was sentenced to jail for six months. But because the jail was so overcrowded, he was released in one month.

"What can we do?" said a policeman. "There are a lot more drunk drivers out there every night than there are police. The only time we can get them off the streets for good is when they kill someone."

52. Boy Drowns in Neighbor's Pool

Hunter Smith, 5, drowned in a swimming pool after apparently wandering away from two teenagers, one of whom was his babysitter. Paramedics and hospital staff members spent several hours trying to revive Hunter. Police pulled the unconscious boy from the cold water of the neighbor's pool about 3:20 p.m. Wednesday.

The babysitter was 16. The other teen was her boyfriend, 17. The boy's parents had no comment about their son's unfortunate death.

Police questioned both teens separately as to how the accident occurred. Their stories did not match. The girl said Hunter disappeared while she was using the bathroom. The boy said Hunter disappeared while he was using the bathroom. After further questioning and some searching around the house, the police determined that the boy disappeared while both teens were using the bedroom.

"They had actually put him in the bedroom closet, but were so busy with each other that they never saw or heard the boy leave the closet and the house," an officer said. Charges might be filed against the teens for involuntary manslaughter and against the neighbor for leaving the gate to the pool unlocked.

53. Woman Dies in House Fire

An 80-year-old woman died Tuesday afternoon in a fire. The blaze was reported about 2:30 p.m. at a home on Sunnyside Avenue. The victim was identified as Mary Cass. Her husband, Roy Cass, 80, was not at home at the time of the fire. Investigators from the local fire department were trying to determine the exact cause of the fire. They said it looked like the woman had fallen asleep on the sofa with a cigarette in her hand.

The value of the home was estimated at \$700,000. The Casses were married in 1945. Both of them had been smokers throughout most of their lives.

Mr. Cass said, "Six months ago, we decided to quit smoking, because we wanted to live to be 100. So we went to a smoking cessation clinic. The clinic worked! We both managed to quit a month ago. At least I thought we both did. I can't believe she was smoking behind my back."

Mr. Cass started sobbing after his remarks. He repeatedly cried out his wife's name. Authorities took him to a nursing home where he could be kept under surveillance.

"We've had too many instances of long-time married couples who, if they discover their spouse is dead, commit suicide within 48 hours," said a nursing home spokesperson. "Mr. Cass's behavior has been erratic, from talking nonstop to crying to staring vacantly. We are going to have to watch him closely."

54. Pilot Killed as Plane Crashes into House

A small plane crashed into a house Sunday afternoon, killing the pilot and destroying half of the home. The family inside the house escaped without injury. The single-engine airplane crashed about 5:30 p.m. The pilot, the only one in the plane, was trying to make an emergency landing at the airport.

The pilot's body was found on the bed in the master bedroom. The plane crashed into one end of the house, where the three bedrooms were. That part of the house was wrecked. The Carols, who own the house, were all at home eating dinner.

"Oh, my gosh," said Mrs. Carol, "I thought the world had come to an end. I never heard such a loud sound. We all ducked under the table, thinking it was another earthquake. When nothing else happened, we got brave and decided to investigate."

They immediately called 911 when they discovered the cause of the thunderous sound. The family was lucky because there was no fire. Authorities suspect that a lack of fuel contributed to the crash. Mr. Carol said that they might have to move out until they can get the house repaired. The police will release the pilot's name after they have notified his next of kin.

55. Fishing for Girls

Wednesday night, Howard asked Glenn if he wanted to go fishing and girl-watching that weekend at Santa Fe Lake. "We'll leave Friday morning and return late Sunday night," he said. Glenn said he had to clean out his garage, so Howard went by himself.

Howard had also planned to lie around the hotel pool, soak up the sun, read a good book, and look at pretty women in their bathing suits. His own apartment didn't have a pool, so whenever he traveled, he always liked to stay at a place with a pool. But when he arrived at the hotel about noon, he saw that there were no pretty girls at the pool. There were no girls at all. There was nobody at the pool, because the pool was empty. It was being repaired all that week. The staff had "forgotten" to tell Howard this little detail.

Howard called Glenn late Friday night.

"How was the fishing?" Glenn asked.

"Didn't see any, didn't catch any," replied Howard.

"Well, did you catch any women?"

"No. And don't even ask how many beauties I saw at the pool. I didn't go to any bars. But I did go to a Mongolian all-you-can-eat place and had a good dinner. I think one of the waitresses liked me. She asked me if I wanted extra ketchup."

"Well, I hope you said yes. Any time a woman asks you if you want extra anything, that's female code. It means they like you."

"I said no. There was a whole bottle right in front of me."

"Well, you blew it. I don't know when you're going to learn to pick up on those signals. Next time I'll go with you and show you all the tricks."

"If you knew all the tricks, you wouldn't be divorced three times."

56. Woman Shot Next to Her Christmas Tree

A woman decorating her Christmas tree Monday was shot in her left arm when a bullet went through her living room window. Police said the incident occurred about 5:00 p.m. A .22 caliber shell casing was found across the street from the victim's home. Police did not find a weapon in the vicinity.

Mrs. Wilma Johnson was treated at a local hospital and allowed to go home. A hospital spokesman said she should recover nicely. She is in her late 50s, divorced, and living with Bob, the older of her two adult sons. Bob wasn't home at the time of the shooting.

Police will patrol the area more frequently as a result of this shooting. They don't know if the shooting was intentional or accidental. They are asking the public to help if they know anything. They interviewed the neighbors. One neighbor said he heard a gunshot, but in this neighborhood, he said, he was used to hearing gunshots.

The police also questioned Mrs. Johnson's ex-husband, Joe, who lives three blocks away. Joe said if he was going to shoot at his ex-wife, he'd make sure he shot her in her butt. "That's a target you could hit from a mile away," he laughed. Despite such remarks, the police spokesperson said Joe is not a suspect at this time.

57. Man Fatally Stabbed Outside Nightclub

A middle-aged man was fatally stabbed outside a nightclub late Saturday night. Bob Evans died about 1:30 a.m. after a woman stabbed him in the back outside Lovers Lounge. Police who arrived at the club found Evans lying in the parking lot with a bloody ice pick on the pavement next to him. A sobbing woman was cradling the victim's head in her lap and stroking his hair.

Police identified the woman as Sara Haynes, 39, an emergency room nurse. They took her into custody and said she would be booked for murder. She was Evans's long-time girlfriend. The lounge's bartender said Haynes started arguing with Evans when she saw him dancing with a young woman.

"I thought there might be trouble when I saw her walk in," said the bartender. "She was looking all around, with a wild look in her eyes. He was on the floor dancing away with this young blonde. She went straight at them. She pulled the blonde out of his arms and started yelling at him."

Evans then led Sara outside, apparently to avoid a scene inside the club. A witness who was sitting in his car told police he saw them argue for a couple of minutes. When Evans turned around to walk back inside, Sara pulled the ice pick out of her purse and stabbed Evans several times. He collapsed to the ground. Then she sat down, put his head in her lap, and started crying.

58. Fishing Boat Sinks, Everyone Saved

A 70-foot fishing boat, the SharkCatcher, sank 5 miles from shore today in the Pacific at about 4:30 p.m. The boat was returning from a successful one-day trip. There were 17 anglers aboard and 4 crew members. There were also about 100 freshly caught tuna, salmon, and mackerel aboard. Some of them may have also survived the sinking.

Luckily, the SharkCatcher started sinking when it was only a quarter mile from another fishing boat, the TunaTaker, which was also returning from a day trip. The two captains, Moe and Curly, had been talking to each other over the radio while headed back to their landing in Santa Barbara. They were comparing notes: who had caught what, how much, and where.

During their conversation, Moe heard what sounded like an explosion. He told Curly to hold on a minute. Moe's crew discovered a hole in the hull that was too big for plugs or pumps. Moe told Curly he needed his help. Moe then told all the passengers to don their lifejackets and abandon the boat.

"This is the second boat that I've lost," said Moe. "The good thing, of course, is that I've never lost any paying customers."

Curly, captain of the rescue boat, said, "We were lucky that it was a clear, calm day. We pulled a lot of people out of the water, but it went very smoothly. I think the Coast Guard will be proud of us."

59. The Mysterious Carport Stain

Oh, no! Denzel thought. Where'd THAT come from? He was looking at a big red dry stain that was on the carport where he always parked his car.

There was only one thing to do: check his power steering fluid and his transmission fluid, both of which were red. The power steering fluid was at the proper level, so that left the transmission fluid. A small leak could result in a damaged transmission, which could cost \$1,000 to \$2,000 to repair or replace. Denzel did not have \$1,000 or \$2,000.

Denzel was not sure about how to check his transmission fluid level. But he found the instructions in his car manual. They were not complicated.

He ran his engine for about 15 minutes to get it up to normal operating temperature. Next, he shifted the transmission through all the gears, and then let the car idle for three minutes in Park. Then he pulled out the dipstick. The fluid was at the correct level. Denzel breathed a sigh of relief.

As he drove off in his car, he wondered if he would ever find out the cause of that stain. Or would it be one of those mysteries of life, like the mystery of why his last girlfriend had left him.

"Why did you break up with me?" he had asked her on the phone a while ago. "I thought everything was going well between us. Then, wham, out of nowhere, you told me we were through. You needed more space, you said. What does THAT mean?"

"It's a long story," she replied.

"Go ahead," he said. "I've got plenty of time."

"I've got to go," she said.

"Women!" Denzel muttered as the phone went dead.

60. Woman Lies About Winning Lottery

A 39-year-old woman admitted that she had lied. She claimed that she bought the latest winning lottery ticket in Massachusetts, but then lost it. The ticket was worth \$18 million after all deductions. Jean Fenn was charged with grand larceny. A conviction could put her in prison for up to seven years.

The real winner of the ticket, Kevin Hayes, 66, presented it a week ago to the liquor store where he had bought it. That store will receive one percent of the prize, or \$180,000. The owner of the store, Mark Abrams, 56, was overjoyed. "Last year we had a storm that blew half of our roof off. It cost \$25,000 to put a new roof on."

Hayes said he was reminded to check his numbers when he heard that a woman had lost her winning ticket. He and his wife had been camping in the mountains when the winning number was drawn.

"But I feel sorry for this woman," said Hayes. "She only did this out of desperation. In fact, I'm going to help her out financially after she gets out of prison. It's a shame that this wealthy country has so many poor people. So, I'm going to donate a lot of this money to different charities. What do I need \$18 million for?"

The checks to Hayes and Abrams should arrive within two weeks, according to a lottery spokesman. The spokesman mentioned that lottery players should remember that the odds of winning the lottery are only about one in forty million. Even so, most people think that SOMEONE has to win, and it might as well be them.

61. Victory Dance Leads to Death

A basketball game ended abruptly Saturday afternoon when 18-year-old Damon Miller was fatally shot at a recreation center. The gunman, who called himself Ace, ran south on Oak Street after the shooting and remains at large. Miller was pronounced dead at the scene by the paramedics. He died from two gunshot wounds to his chest. The paramedics did not arrive immediately because they were tied up at a four-car crash a mile away. This was the second such shooting during a basketball game, apparently by the same gunman.

According to witnesses, Miller did a little dance after making a game-winning 3-point basket. When Ace told him to stop celebrating, Miller ignored him. Then Ace pulled a small gun out of his baggy shorts and fired two quick shots. Everyone else backed away. Instead of running immediately, Ace picked up the basketball and made a 3-pointer himself. Then he did a little dance next to the victim's head and fled.

A police officer said the suspect will be charged with "a lot more than unsportsmanlike conduct" when arrested. Eyewitnesses said Ace is a white male, 5'11", about 200 pounds, with a small scar on his left cheek.

Local activists criticized the police for dragging their feet in their search for the suspect. "You can bet if it was two white men who had been shot by a black man, there'd be a policeman on every basketball court in town till he was caught," said one activist.

62. Eat Your Vegetables

The federal government, displaying even less sense than usual, has yielded to the French fry industry. Frozen French fries—sliced, fried in oil, and then packaged—are now approved as "fresh vegetables" by the US Department of Agriculture.

The French fry industry has been petitioning the USDA for years to get this approval. They say that their product is similar to cucumbers that have a wax coating. They argue that they use 100 percent vegetable oil, which is much healthier for consumers than plain wax.

Most consumers, of course, beg to differ. "You must be joking," said Annie, 50. "How can you consider a product that's deep-fried in oil to be a fresh vegetable? Even if I steamed broccoli, I could no longer call it fresh broccoli—it's cooked! I wish I were a lobbyist, so my congressman would help me. Unfortunately, I'm only a tax-paying citizen."

The USDA defends its decision, saying that potatoes undeniably are vegetables. Although French fries are fried in oil, they are still potatoes. If you let them sit on your countertop for a couple of weeks, a USDA spokesman said, the fries will rot just like all other fresh vegetables.

Consumer advocates say the USDA has totally lost touch with the consumers. "They'd probably declare that eggshells are nutritious if a lobbyist asked them to," said one advocate.

63. Honk if You're in a Hurry

Mark was cursing the driver in front of him because she was creeping along. He was running late for a golf game with his friend Barney. He was on a two-lane road that led to the golf course. The road was straight uphill. It went for six blocks through a busy residential neighborhood. There was a four-way stop sign at the end of each block.

Every time the woman ahead arrived at a stop sign, she looked left and right. Then she looked left and right again. Then she proceeded slowly forward.

Mark was pulling his hair out. Never be in a hurry in LA, he muttered to himself. Mark didn't pass her because there was too much oncoming traffic. At the very last stop sign, she turned right.

At last, no one was in front of him. Mark put the pedal to the metal to make up for lost time. However, as soon as he rounded the first curve, he had to immediately brake for a cement truck crawling up the hill at about 5 mph. Mark couldn't believe it. His tee time was 11:45 and it was 11:39. Mark ignored the solid yellow line and passed the truck. It was 11:40 when he got to the parking lot. He walked quickly to the clubhouse to tell Mel, the assistant pro, that he had arrived.

Mel said, "We're running about 10 minutes behind, so you're okay. But Barney just called. He said there was a fatal accident on the freeway. The highway patrol closed his side of the freeway. He said to go on without him; he's going back home."

64. The Man Who Loved Women

Grady was rich, but he was 78 and on his deathbed. No amount of money—or love—could save him now.

In his youth, Grady had been a major skirt-chaser. No woman was safe from his charm. He used to juggle three or four girlfriends at a time.

He'd often accidentally call them by the wrong names. The first time that happened to a new girlfriend, she would get upset. Instead of lying, Grady would admit that he had another girlfriend—or two. "But," he would quickly add, "you are my number one. You'll always be my number one."

Somehow, this little white lie often worked. Sometimes his various girlfriends would even end up meeting each other and become fast friends.

Any attractive woman was a target for Grady. He would walk right up to her and say, "You're very attractive. Are you single and unattached?" If she said yes, he'd invite her out for a cup of coffee right then and there. If she said yes, but she didn't have time just then for coffee, he'd get her phone number and ask for a rain check. If she said no, he'd ask her if she had a twin sister who was single and unattached. This often made the woman smile or laugh. Sometimes she would change her no to a yes.

Grady was a wonderful dancer. He was just average-looking, but he carried himself with confidence and had a ready smile and a pleasant laugh. He was well-read, he knew a thousand jokes, and he had no bad habits. Perhaps most important, he made a woman feel like a woman, according to many of his girlfriends.

Even in his old age, Grady hadn't slowed down. Tending to his dying needs were Didi and Mimi, a pair of 40-year-old twins that Grady had finally "settled down" with.

65. How to Get out of Jury Duty

The mailman delivers good news and bad news. Topping the "bad news" list for many people who live in Los Angeles is a jury summons. This document tells you that you must respond by mail or phone for possible service on a jury. Many people feel that jury duty is a boring chore and would prefer not doing it.

In fact, court clerks say that the most common question they hear is: Why do I have to serve? The official response is: Jury duty is a responsibility that all qualified citizens must share.

If you are a citizen, if you can read and understand English, if you're over 18 years old, and if you're not a felon, you are eligible for jury duty. If you ignore the summons, you might be fined up to \$1,500.

A jury trial might last one day or one month. If you work for the government, this is no problem, because the government will pay you your regular salary while you are on jury duty. However, if you are self-employed, you lose your regular income for that time period. Instead of your regular income, you get \$15 a DAY for sitting on a jury. This is another reason people try to avoid jury duty.

Jack got the bad news yesterday. Even though he was retired and sat around all day watching reruns of old movies, he told his wife Polly he wasn't going to be a juror. He hated jury duty and he was not going to let the courts interfere with his retirement.

"So how do you think you are going to get out of it?" Polly asked, both amused and irritated. "Are you going to claim that you're dead? Or are you going to tell them you've moved out of the country?"

"No, both of those involve too much paperwork. I've got a better idea. It's a medical excuse. It says here that if you have a physical disability, you can be dismissed."

"What's your disability? Your 'bad back' doesn't allow you to sit in a chair watching reruns all day?"

"No. Something better than that. I've got gas. It'll offend the other jurors and everyone else in the courtroom. They'll have to open all the windows or issue gas masks."

"But there's one problem. You don't have gas."

"But I know how to create it. I'll eat a lot of peanuts and fruit the morning that I go to court. As soon as they get a whiff of my 'problem,' they'll tell me to go home and stay home."

"That's a brilliant idea!" Polly said, as she rolled her eyes. At least it would get him out of the house for one day, she thought.

66. The Way to a Man's Heart

Lina often asked Luke to dinner. Lina loved Luke, but Luke loved Lina's cooking, not Lina herself. Lina accepted that for the time being. But she felt that, with enough meals and enough time, she would get her man.

Luke rarely stayed more than ten minutes past the last bite of dessert. Lina would ask Luke if he wanted to watch TV, or play cards or chess, or take a walk around the neighborhood, but Luke always declined. He always said, "I've got to go." They both knew that Luke didn't have to go anywhere. All he ever did was go back to his apartment and read books or go online.

Tonight was probably going to be more of the same. But Lina was a patient woman. She loved to cook, and she loved to watch people eat her cooking. Tonight she prepared shrimp, fresh green beans, mashed potatoes, and asparagus. Luke ate everything with gusto. Then she brought out her homemade cheesecake with vanilla ice cream for dessert.

Luke asked, "Are you trying to fatten me up for something? Every time I come over here, I have to eat celery and lettuce for a week to get back down to my normal weight."

"Oh, stop exaggerating," Lina replied. "You enjoy every mouthful."

"You're right. I apologize. I love your cooking, and if you didn't invite me over here, I'd be hurt and hungry."

Lina watched contentedly as Luke devoured the cheesecake and ice cream. Someday, she thought, I will be his dessert.

67. Female Seeks Mature Male

Julia was 12 years old. Her best friend Betsy was 13. Summer was almost over. School was about to start. Julia and Betsy were having lunch at BurgerBoy. Betsy had decided that Julia needed a boyfriend.

"But why?" asked Julia. "I'm okay without one. What good is a 12-year-old boy anyway? All they're interested in is playing baseball or riding their skateboards. Where does a girl fit into that picture?"

"Don't be silly," replied Betsy. "And forget about 12-year-olds. They're immature. You should go for someone more experienced—someone at least 13 years old. Someone who will carry your books and walk you to your classes. You need someone who'll give you a Valentine's Day card and remember your birthday. You need someone to comfort you when you're sad and lonely. You need someone to protect you."

"But my dad does that! That's what dads are for. He comforts me; he protects me. And he remembers my birthday, too. I've got a backpack to carry my books, and I know where all my classes are. I don't need an escort. And a Valentine's Day card means that someone loves you. What if I don't love them back? I don't want a Valentine's Day card from someone I don't love. I don't love anyone anyway. I'm too young. I don't think I even know what love is. Besides, you don't have a boyfriend. Why should I?"

"Because you're my first client. I've decided that I'm going to be a matchmaker when I grow up."

"Well, if I'm your first client, that means I'll probably also be your first mistake. No, thank you."

68. Let's Go Fishing

Dave needed to pack for Saturday's fishing trip. He went into his hall closet, where he had more than 20 rods and reels. Nowadays he went fishing twice a year at Big Bear, a huge lake in southern California about 7,000 feet up in the mountains.

California tries to boost the fishing industry by sponsoring a Free Fishing Day twice a year, once in June and once in September. That sufficed for Dave. He went mostly because it was a social event with a few friends, not so much to catch fish. Even by itself, the scenic drive up a twisty two-lane road was worth the trip. Not to mention the big, beautiful houses and trees that lined the shore of the lake.

Packing was a project in itself. Dave had even created a computer file named Fishing Trip. It was a checklist of 45 things to take to Big Bear. He took two rods, because on Free Fishing Day you were allowed to fish with two rods instead of the usual one rod. He took a hooded sweatshirt, jeans, two pair of socks, a heavy hooded denim jacket, winter gloves, and a scarf. He also took flip-flops, shorts, a T-shirt, #30 sun block, sunglasses, a big hat, and a lightweight raincoat. If you go to Big Bear in June, you'd better be prepared for hot or cold, rain or shine.

He packed a couple of magazines to read just in case the fish weren't biting. He and his friends joked that the fish were always biting - in the spot you just left or the spot you were headed to.

After about an hour and a half, Dave had gathered all the items on his list into a neat pile next to his door. He went to bed knowing that tomorrow's weather and fishing were unpredictable, but the good time with his friends was a given.

69. Train Wreck "Frees" Cows

A Continental Pacific Railroad freight train derailed on Tuesday about 40 miles north of Sacramento. The exact cause is still being investigated, but authorities say it was no accident. The head engineer said everything was fine; then suddenly, everything wasn't.

Of the freight train's 86 cars, 22 went off the tracks. Fortunately, this incident did not involve any fatalities, human or otherwise. The head engineer was treated for a broken wrist at a nearby hospital. He was the only casualty.

Trains throughout California frequently carry dangerous cargoes, such as chemicals. When these trains derail, authorities immediately evacuate nearby communities because of the danger of explosions or of harmful fumes. However, this train carried only lumber, new automobiles, and cattle destined for slaughter.

After the mishap, lumber was scattered on either side of the tracks. About 20 automobiles were damaged. The biggest problem, however, was the cattle. About 300 of them were standing on or near the tracks, wandering into the nearby woods, or standing on the nearby highway. Traffic on the two-lane highway was backed up for almost a mile in each direction.

"We know who did this," said a California Highway Patrol spokesman. "The train was sabotaged by a group called Tofu for You. They left their pamphlets all over the crime scene. They 'liberate' animals that are on their way to the slaughterhouse. They think Americans should eat tofu instead of meat. They're wasting their time. All these cows are going to be burgers by tomorrow night."

70. Valuable Guitar Found

A classical guitarist was thrilled to hear from New York City police that his valuable guitar had been found. It disappeared almost a year ago when he got out of a taxicab and forgot to take the guitar with him. Laurence Lennon, 44, said he was running late that day. He was talking to his manager on his cell phone when he dashed out of the cab. He said that he gave the driver \$60 and told him to keep the change. He walked through the front doors of the concert hall still talking on the phone to his manager.

Upon discovering his loss, Lennon used his cell phone to call the police. The policewoman asked him for the name of the cab company, the number of the cab, and the name of the driver. He said that she had to be kidding.

She told Lennon that he could file a missing items report at the police station or online. Lennon asked for the online address. It was www.nypd.gov/toprotectandtoserve/haveaniceday. She told him that finding the guitar might take a couple of years—finding guitars was not as important as finding murderers and marijuana smokers. Then she told him to have a nice day.

"This year has been depressing," said Lennon. "I had to postpone the recording of two new CDs. I've been using borrowed guitars. And I was losing hope of ever recovering my guitar."

Lennon was reunited with his \$100,000 guitar yesterday. The case and the guitar had been discovered in the corner of a coffeehouse only two blocks from where Lennon had lost it in the first place. Lennon had offered a \$10,000 reward for its return. He said he would give the reward to the coffeehouse owner, who had notified the police. The police department prepared a news release about its success in tracking down the guitar.

71. Stepmother Kills Herself

Lois Castle, 58, committed suicide at home with a revolver yesterday. Two police officers heard a single gunshot as they were about to knock on her front door. They were at her house to arrest her for the 1970 murder of her young stepdaughter. Castle apparently realized that she was going to be arrested. Only a month earlier she had been interviewed by detectives about Dorothy's death 35 years ago.

In 1970, Castle told police that the girl had fallen out of a tree she was climbing and hit her head on a rock. But Dorothy's natural father, Dwayne, who was married to Castle at the time, thought his wife was lying. "She said she would hurt me if I bother her again," Dorothy had told her father earlier.

"Your little girl is making up stories about me. I try to love her, but she rejects me," Castle told Dwayne.

An autopsy was inconclusive, and the death was ruled accidental. Dwayne divorced Castle shortly thereafter.

But the case was reopened recently when a playmate of Dorothy's came forward. Beverly Lisenby, also seven at that time, said she was about to knock on the door of Dorothy's house that fateful day. But instead of knocking, she listened quietly as she heard Dorothy screaming for help and Castle telling her to shut up. Beverly listened until it was silent inside, then ran back home. She was so shaken by the event that she had told no one in all these years.

The coroner dug up Dorothy's body and did a second autopsy. Using new crime-solving tools, he determined that Dorothy had been struck in the skull several times by a rock the size of a baseball.

The police are now trying to locate Dwayne to tell him the good news.

72. Beautiful Teacher Smiles, then Walks Away

The annual teachers' meeting was the only time that all the teachers got together in one place at one time. It was a 3-hour meeting, from 7 to 10 p.m. Lecturers talked on various subjects. Each talk was followed by a question and answer period. It was an informal, pleasant evening.

The evening always began with a delicious dinner catered by a local restaurant. This year's host was a Middle Eastern restaurant. Teachers piled as much as they wanted on their paper plates and found a seat outdoors or in the auditorium. Most teachers really seemed to appreciate the food.

For Shane, this evening was his opportunity to check out the female teachers. This year, a beauty walked into the auditorium about 10 minutes late. She sat in the row in front of Shane, just two seats away. Shane couldn't believe it. She was not only the best-looking woman in the auditorium, but she smiled at him before she sat down. She was tall and had long red hair. She was wearing a sexy black cocktail dress.

Shane could not focus on the meeting anymore. He looked at the lecturers less than he looked at the redhead. He was enveloped in her perfume. She took notes right-handed. She ran her fingers through her hair. She crossed and uncrossed her legs. Shane was going crazy. Plus, there was no ring on her left hand.

The meeting ended. The dean thanked everyone for attending. Everybody applauded the presenters. The redhead stood up. Shane stood up. She smiled at him, and then walked out. Shane walked out. She went to the restroom. Shane waited. When she came out, he walked up to her.

"Hi," he smiled. "My name's Shane. I was wondering if you have time for a cup of coffee. I was hoping we could share some of our teaching experiences."

She smiled. "Why, thank you. That's sweet of you. I appreciate your offer, but I've got to get home. My husband is babysitting tonight, and I'm sure he's pretty tired. Maybe another time?" She smiled, and walked away.

73. Are Criminals Taking Over LA?

A 29-year-old woman was driving her car in the wrong place at the wrong time. She was fatally wounded by a couple of stray bullets. The bullets were intended for a 20-year-old man, who was seriously wounded by two other bullets.

The shootings occurred an hour before sunset, a mile west of downtown Los Angeles. Two gang members attempted to rob the 20-year-old man. The victim punched one of his attackers, knocking him down, and then took off running. As he ran, the gangsters fired several times and struck him in the back.

They also put a couple of errant shots into the head of the woman driver. Mortally wounded, she crashed through the big glass window of a salon, coming to a stop at the hair-washing sinks.

Fortunately, the salon was closed because its owner was at a family funeral. His nephew had been stabbed to death by a gang member a week earlier. The gang member, who was robbing the nephew, got angry when all he found in the nephew's wallet was a dollar, an ID card, and a library card.

"A library card!" the gang member said angrily. "You think you're smarter than me? If you're so smart, why are you getting robbed?" He then stabbed the victim multiple times, ripped up the library card, spit on it, and ran away.

"This city's getting ridiculous," said a local neighborhood watch member. "Criminals are killing people almost every day. They laugh at us. They know that, even if convicted, they will get free housing, free meals, and free medical care. And they get to sit around in jail all day reading magazines! That's punishment? It sounds more like a reward! What do the rest of us get for being HONEST? We get to work hard all day so we can die tired and poor."

74. Police Arrest Happy Van Driver

Police in San Dimas pulled over a florist's van yesterday and arrested the driver, Karl Rover, for smoking and transporting marijuana. The police got suspicious when Karl remained stopped even after the light had turned green.

One officer asked Karl where he was headed. Grinning broadly, Karl said he was making a delivery. The officer told Karl to turn off the radio, which was blasting rock music. "Dude, this is the Grateful Dead," Karl groaned.

A moment later, Karl's cell phone rang. Karl said, "Hey, dude. What's up?" The officer grabbed the phone from Karl.

"Did you get the cash for the weed?" asked the voice on the other end.

"Yes," the officer replied, pretending that he was Karl.

"How much did you get?"

"\$1,000."

"\$1,000! \$1,000! What is the matter with you? That's \$50,000 worth of grass, you idiot! I'm going to kill you!"

The officer laughed when the other person hung up. He went around to the back of the van and opened the doors. Although there were flowers in the back, there were also many plastic bags, each about 12" square, packed tightly with marijuana.

In the cab of the van, a joint was smoldering in the ashtray. The officer took it out of the ashtray and held it up to Karl. "What do you know about this?" he asked Karl.

Grinning, Karl said, "What do I know about it? I know everything about it. I planted it, I watered it, I harvested it, and I rolled it. It's dynamite weed, dude. Try it!"

The officer brought out his handcuffs. Karl's grin disappeared. "Hey, at least let me have one more hit!"

75. Open Wide and Say Your Prayers

Three months had passed. It was time for Tony to visit his dental hygienist again. The visit usually lasted two to three hours. The hygienist always went through a list of questions about his health. Then she took his pulse and blood pressure. Last, she ran her gloved finger all around the inside of his mouth, looking for and feeling for abnormalities.

On this visit, she found one. It was a white spot on the side of his tongue. "We often see this in smokers' mouths," she told him. She called the dentist over.

"How long has that been there?" he asked Tony.

"I have no idea," said Tony.

"We're going to have to do a biopsy," the dentist said. "It won't require more than two or three stitches. We have to make sure this spot is benign. We'll do it right after your teeth are cleaned."

Tony couldn't eat anything except soup for a couple of days after the surgery, nor could he pronounce words clearly. If the white spot were malignant, how much more surgery would be required? How much of his tongue would be removed? He regretted all those years of smoking.

A week later, the dentist removed the stitches and told Tony that the white spot was benign. Tony was relieved.

A few days afterward, Tony was talking to a friend of his who was a long-time smoker. "You really ought to quit," he suggested. "That was a good scare I just got from my dentist. Getting part of your tongue cut out is not a pleasant thought."

"I'm not worried. You've got to die of something. I've got a greater chance of getting killed by a drunk driving a white SUV than by some white spot on my tongue. Besides, this is my only vice. I need to be able to enjoy something in life, don't I?"

76. The Final Phone Call

"But I love you so much," she said. "I think I must be crazy. I can't stop thinking about you. I want to be with you all the time. I want to marry you."

"Maybe you are a little crazy," he said. "Although I think that's part of being in love. But you hardly know me. I like you, but I'm not in love with you. I don't think I could ever be in love with you."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," he lied. "You're not my type."

"I'm not your type," she repeated. "What is your type? A woman with no wrinkles and a perfect body? A woman who is beautiful even when she wakes up? A movie star? Is that your type?"

"No, of course not," he lied again. "I don't know. I'm like everybody else—you're either attracted to a certain person or you're not."

"So you're not attracted to me?"

"Well, I didn't say that," he lied a third time.

"I'm making a fool of myself. You might even be laughing at me. You don't love me. You just said that you never could love me."

"No, I said I could never be IN love with you," he said.

"'Love,' 'in love.' What difference does it make any more? I apologize. It was nice of you to put up with me. Please forgive me for making a fool of myself and for bothering you. I will never call you again. I must try to forget you now. I am dropping out of school tomorrow; I can't go there without thinking of you. My heart is so sad."

She hung up. Alan walked outside. What was he supposed to do? He liked her, but he certainly didn't love her. Lead her on with lies, or tell her the truth now?

There was a beautiful full moon. But he felt sad. He knew that Natalie was probably crying right now. She must be so lonely.

77. The Doctor's Almost Perfect Children

Veronica was an only child. Even as a child, she decided that she was going to be a doctor. All her dolls became her patients. All her dollhouses became hospitals for her patients. She spent her early childhood treating her patients for all kinds of diseases and injuries. She saved all of them and billed none of them.

Veronica got straight A's in high school and college, because she knew that good grades would help her get into a good medical school. She graduated from medical school near the top of her class. She became a pediatrician. She got married and had two kids, one boy and one girl. Veronica's husband David was an architect and a great cook. Her children did their homework without being told. They got straight A's in school. They ate all their vegetables without complaining. They were perfect little children, except for one thing: They argued with each other constantly.

Veronica got home at 4:30 p.m. today. David gave her a big kiss and a hug. Then her kids gave her a kiss and a hug. She went upstairs and changed into shorts and a T-shirt. When she returned, the kids were waiting for her in the living room to talk about their day in school.

Marvin, 10, said that today his biology teacher helped them cut up dead frogs. They smelled bad, but he enjoyed seeing their little body parts, like their lungs and heart. "I like biology," Marvin said. "I want to be a biologist, an animal doctor, and an inventor when I grow up. I'm going to invent a pill so that animals all learn to live together without eating each other all the time."

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Rebecca. "What are the animals going to eat if they don't eat each other?"

"You don't know anything. You're a girl and you're only nine," taunted Marvin.

"Marvin, be polite to your sister," Veronica admonished.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "I apologize, dear little sister."

"That didn't sound very sincere, mommy," Rebecca complained.

"Okay, here's how I'll keep the animals from eating each other. I already thought of that, of course. The solution is a pill that will make all animals like to eat grass, like the cows and sheep do. That way no more animals will eat each other, and kids won't have to mow the lawn any more. So, that will kill two birds with one stone."

"Well, that's very clever," Veronica told Marvin.

78. There Goes the Neighborhood!

Carbon Street is a long, tree-lined street with majestic houses on either side. The houses are owned by millionaires who cherish their quiet, residential street. Throughout the day, the only noise is usually the sound of various birds singing in the trees or the occasional jetliner flying high overhead. Not even the sound of gas leaf blowers or gas lawn mowers invades the silence.

But, nothing lasts forever. Carbon Street is about to change. Mr. Bing, a self-made billionaire, has a plan. A big plan. A big plan for a big house. Mr. Bing says he likes to do everything big.

"I like to make a statement. What's the use of being on this planet if others don't know that you're here? After years of searching all over the world, I have determined that Carbon Street is the perfect place to live. I plan to build the biggest house in the world at the end of this street. Construction will take about three years, but it will be worth it. I'm going to throw at least one party every weekend for all my friends. It's going to be fantastic!"

"It's going to be a nightmare," said one neighbor. "We're already talking to some realtors. Three years of construction. Three years of trucks going back and forth every day. And then parties every weekend? We can't even sue him—I think he's got more money than our whole state. No, it's time to move. We went from having the nicest neighborhood to having the worst neighborhood, all because of one new neighbor. I wonder who the idiot is who told him about our street."

79. Let's Go to Vegas!

Sandra had not been to Las Vegas in more than a year. She was excited. Her sister Janice was coming by to pick her up in about ten minutes. Sandra finished putting her toothbrush and toothpaste into her travel bag; those were the last two items on her "to pack" list.

She had called ahead, of course, to get a room for Janice and herself. The hotel told her that no more rooms were available at the price that was advertised in the newspaper. This was no surprise to Sandra. So, she put down a \$100 nonrefundable deposit on a room for two nights. The cost for both nights was going to be \$200 plus taxes, surcharges, and other fees.

She looked at her watch. Janice was late, of course. Sandra had forgotten to remind Janice of today's departure time. To put it kindly, Janice was not exactly the most organized person in the world. Sandra called Janice up. She left a short message: "Where are you? It's time to go to Vegas!"

A few minutes later, Janice called back. She had a big problem—a schedule conflict. She had already promised to attend her daughter's eighth-grade graduation ceremony this very weekend.

"Oh, Sandra, I'm so sorry," Janice said. "I know how much you had wanted to do this. I thought Alice's graduation ceremony and party were next week. I get so confused sometimes. I'll make this up to you, I promise. Maybe you can call up Lily; she might be available, even though it's really short notice. If not, don't worry, I'll pay you for everything and we can make plans again."

Sandra sighed and dialed her friend Lily. She wondered how Janice had made it through life so unorganized.

80. Squirrel Attacks Woman in Golf Cart

A woman golfing with her husband and her mother was taken to the local hospital yesterday afternoon. The woman was struck by a golf cart driven by her mom.

Ginger Rogers, 55, was hit by the cart about 2 p.m. at Fairway Golf Course. She was examining her 50-foot putt on the par 5 tenth hole when she heard her mother scream. Ginger turned around just in time to see her mom driving straight toward her. The force of the collision knocked her over, and the cart then ran over her foot.

Her mom, 81 years old, said that a squirrel had jumped up into the cart looking for snacks. She tried to shoo the squirrel away. Instead, it rose up on its hind feet and made a hissing sound. Startled and frightened, the old lady hit the gas pedal.

The paramedics arrived about 15 minutes later and treated Ginger for a broken left ankle. They gave a mild sedative to her mother, who kept muttering, "Vicious, simply vicious." Then they took Ginger to the hospital. Mr. Rogers promised his wife he would visit her after he finished his round.

John Dean, an attorney for the golf course, said the golf course was not responsible for the actions of its animals. He added, "If the ladies want to sue, they'll have to sue the squirrel. We're still assessing the damage to the cart and the green. It looks fairly light; I doubt that the driver will owe us more than \$1,000."

81. He Goes to War to Save His Baby

Roland was a carpenter in Virginia. He and Sheila had three kids—two boys and baby Jessica. The baby had been in and out of the hospital for the last year because of infections and other problems. She was very weak and sick. The doctors were not confident that she would live another year.

Taking care of Jessica was expensive. The family was deep in debt. Roland, an independent subcontractor, had medical insurance, but he had very high deductibles.

Things were bad. Roland saw no light at the end of this tunnel. Then he saw an ad in the newspaper: "Security guards/contract workers wanted. \$100,000 a year. First \$80,000 tax free. \$20,000 bonus for extending contract an extra year." He called the number. The line was busy, but he kept calling and finally got through. He was worried that the jobs were all taken, but they told him plenty of jobs were still available. They said they would give him two weeks of training in Texas. Then they would fly him to Iraq for his assignment.

Roland told Sheila he had to take this job. He knew it was dangerous; he might get injured or killed, but the money was too good. Plus, the family would have full medical benefits, which would enable the baby to get the care she needed. Roland said if he survived the first year, he would probably sign up for the bonus and a second year.

Sheila was worried. She asked, "What if you get killed? What are we going to do without you?"

"You can't think like that, honey," he said. "You've got to think positive. Think about how well off we'll be in two or three years after I bring back all that money. This is the best thing I could do for this family."

Sheila hugged him and sobbed. "I don't want you to go."

Roland flew to Houston five days later.

82. English Is Confusing

"Good evening, everybody!" said the teacher, Donna. "Where is everybody?" That was sort of a daily joke by Donna. Usually the class started with only two or three students present, and then filled up as the minutes went by. It was summertime. Summer school was only eight weeks long. Class attendance was always smaller than during fall and spring semesters.

"I don't know, teacher. Maybe they late or no come," said one student. "Maybe watching TV football tonight."

"Is there a soccer game tonight? It seems like there's a soccer game every night. Oh, well. Let's get started, okay? We're on page 36 in the workbook. Tonight we're studying participles as adjectives. Students are always confused when they learn about the present and past participles, so we will practice this a lot. Tonight, we're just going to practice the present participle.

"The present participle tells us what emotion or feeling the subject is causing. For example, 'Grammar is boring' means that the subject—grammar—causes an emotion of boredom. If we say, 'The movie is interesting,' we are saying that the movie causes a feeling of interest. If we say, 'The roller coaster is exciting,' we are saying that the roller coaster causes a feeling of excitement. Any questions so far? Am I confusing you? Is everyone confused?"

The classroom was quiet. Donna looked at blank faces. They were confused. She knew this would take a while. But eventually, the faster students would grasp it, and then they would help the slower students. By the end of the evening, most of the class would feel comfortable using the present participle.

Donna erased the board and put some new examples on it. She loved guiding her students through difficult topics like this one. She always felt a little bit thrilled when the look of understanding came to their faces.

83. Pump Up the Tires and Ride the Bike

The blue bike was sitting in Owen's living room. It had no kickstand, so he had wedged the front tire in between two bookshelves so that the bike would stand upright. Both tires were flat. Dust covered the bike. However, no household spiders had set up a web site. When was the last time I rode this thing, he wondered as he looked at it.

It was Sunday. Sunset was still almost two hours away. The temperature had been 86 at noon, but had dropped to about 76. Owen had spent Saturday and most of Sunday cleaning up his apartment. The termite inspector was coming on Monday. Owen wanted the inspector to be able to "inspect" without tripping over boxes, books, fishing rods, and golf clubs.

Owen was going to reward himself with a late afternoon bicycle ride. He enjoyed riding or walking through his neighborhood with its many beautiful houses, yards, and trees. But first, he had to inflate both bike tires. He got out a hand air pump he had bought at a thrift shop for only \$2. The pump nozzle adapter didn't fit onto the bike's valve stem. Nothing is ever simple, he thought.

He looked for his new pump, the one that had cost \$10. It had all the bells and whistles: high volume air flow on both up and down strokes, quick lock valve adapter and four nozzle adapters, air gauge, and footplate for easy pumping. It was a beauty. Of course, Owen couldn't find it. I've got everything, but I can't find anything, Owen muttered.

As usual, Owen did find one thing while he was looking for another thing. He found another used pump that he had been looking for a month ago. It was a big, heavy, steel pump that had an air gauge and a small leak somewhere. Owen connected the pump to the rear tire. He started pumping. The "small" leak seemed to have gotten bigger. Owen stopped counting after the first 80 pumps; finally the dial hit 65 psi. He was huffing and puffing. He went to the refrigerator and got a diet soda. After finishing it, he pumped up the front tire. Sweat dripped from his forehead. That was a good workout, he thought as he finished off a second soda. He screwed the valve stem caps back on. He stood back and admired his "new" tires proudly.

The bike was now ready to ride. Owen, however, felt a little tired. Plus, he was hungry. In fact, it looked like it was getting too dark for a long ride. There's always tomorrow, he thought as he opened the refrigerator door. The chilled air felt good.

84. Don't Go Swimming on an Empty Stomach

Pete had lived in Florida for 20 years. A boring 20 years, he often thought. His house was only a 10-minute walk from the Gulf. He walked to the sandy white beach almost every day. Bob's Liquors was at the corner, halfway to the beach. It was the only store within a mile. It sold cold beer and cigarettes, which were the only two things that interested Pete today. The owner of Bob's was Bill. Bill had bought the store from Bob, but never renamed the store. "'Bob's' has a nice ring to it," he told curious customers. Also, of course, keeping the old name saved him money, time, and trouble.

When the water was unsafe, the lifeguards would put red flags all up and down the beach to warn swimmers to stay out of the water. Today was a red flag day. Fierce riptides and lots of jellyfish were predicted for the next 48 hours.

Although windy and completely overcast, it was a warm September day. Pete stopped at Bob's. Bill said hello and told Pete to be careful because of the riptide reports. He asked, "What'll it be today, Pete?"

Pete ordered the usual—a pack of cigarettes and beer. Bill put the six-pack into a double paper bag because that helped keep the beer cold longer. Pete paid him and said goodbye. He walked out the door and crossed the two-lane street, not bothering to look in either direction.

The flags were flapping loudly. Small waves were splashing onto the beach. Sea gulls were walking at water's edge. Low thunder rumbled occasionally in the distance. An irregular line showed where wet sand met dry sand. Pete sat down on the dry sand. He opened a can of beer and lit a cigarette. There was no one else at the beach, except a woman walking away from him, stopping frequently to examine seashells. Pete watched a pelican dive into the water. Far away on the horizon, a stationary ship floated.

Pete was a strong swimmer. He had learned to swim when he was four years old. In grade school and high school, he won numerous swimming and diving tournaments. His parents had high hopes that he would compete in the Olympics.

Pete opened the fifth beer and lit yet another cigarette. The woman collecting seashells had disappeared from sight. He got up and walked into the water. When the water was almost thigh-high, he felt the current tugging at him. A jellyfish stung him behind his right knee. He took a final drag on his cigarette and flicked it into the water. He finished the beer, filled the empty can with sea water, and threw it back onto the beach. He looked at the ship.

Then he dove in and started swimming.

85. The Park That Went to the Dogs

When Winnie and Arnold bought their house at the end of a cul-de-sac in 1980, they thought they had died and gone to heaven. There were only four houses on the street. Between their house and their neighbor's house was a dirt pathway. The path led to a city-owned dog park, where dog owners could let their dogs run free. But there was no parking lot for dog owners' cars. Dog owners had to park on the street, and then walk their dogs to the leash-free park.

In 1980 no one seemed to know about the park. The only people who used it were the people who lived in the neighborhood. The neighbors used to joke that they had their own private dog park.

Those were the good old days. Things have changed. The park has become like California in the Gold Rush days. Everyone knows about it. A dog may be man's best friend, but 1,000 dogs certainly are not.

Over the years, the neighborhood association, consisting of about 70 houses nearest to the park, has begged the city council to reduce park hours. It is open from 7:00 to 7:00 seven days a week. But some dog owners actually arrive at 6:00, saying that they needed to beat the rush. To save walking distance, others park in neighborhood driveways. Others bring boom boxes and play music loudly in the park. Others knock on neighborhood doors and ask to use the bathroom. Weekends are even worse than weekdays. Whole families spend the day with their dogs. People, dogs, noise, and trash are everywhere.

"We're stuck here," said Arnold. "I've been trying to sell my place for five years. But when buyers see all this dog traffic, they take off running. What a joke. This place was heaven when we first moved here. Now it's hell."

The city council has ignored the neighborhood association's pleas for help. A council member said, "We have to meet the public demand. This no-leash park is very popular. I'm sorry, but if the homeowners don't like it, they can always move. This is a free country, you know."

86. Brother, Can You Spare a Carburetor?

Daniel needed a new carburetor for his car. Well, not a new one. A new one would cost at least \$250. Even a rebuilt one would cost about \$110. The cheapest thing to do was to go to a salvage yard.

California has about 50 salvage yards. Most of them are in southern California. The yards range in size from 10 acres to 70 acres, holding anywhere from 300 to 3,000 abandoned, wrecked, or cheaply sold cars. The yards are usually located outside of downtown but near a freeway ramp.

A salvage yard might pay you up to \$200 to take your rundown car off your hands. Before they place it in the yard, however, they will remove all its liquids—oil, gas, coolant, brake fluid, transmission fluid, power steering fluid, and windshield washer solvent. Vehicles usually sit in the yard for only a month before they are crushed, stacked, and then transported to a recycler.

Vehicle parts are inexpensive, but you have to remove them yourself. The carburetor that Daniel needed was only \$20. Nothing in the yard, however, comes with a guarantee. If it doesn't work or fit, you can replace it with a similar item, but you won't get your money back.

Daniel borrowed his brother's car. After paying the \$3 entry fee to the man in the little wooden shack, Daniel walked into the yard. He walked about five minutes before he found the foreign car section. It looked like there were at least 200 cars. It was sunny and hot. There was no shade anywhere in the yard. Carrying his toolbox, Daniel went searching for a matching carburetor.

Almost three hours later, Daniel was back at the shack. He bought himself a cold soda from a machine. A few minutes later, he paid the \$20 plus tax and walked out of the yard. Driving home, he wondered if all the work was worth the savings. If the carburetor didn't work, he'd have to do this all over again.

When he got home, his brother Monty was standing next to Daniel's car. Monty had a big smile on his face. "Hey, guess what? It wasn't your carburetor. It was the fuel filter. I changed it, and your car runs great now."

87. Golf Like a Girl, Manage Like a Man

He was in his 60s. He was short, fat, and arrogant. He was the plant manager, the supervisor, the boss! His name was Tom. He relished every minute of his power. He yelled at the employees. He called them names. He smoked daily, even though it was against the law to smoke in the workplace. He didn't care. As the license plate on his car said, he was The Boss.

California is an "at will" state. That means that your employer can let you go for no reason ("You're fired!") or almost any reason ("You're fired because you're too tall!"). You can take your firing to court if it involves discrimination—sexism, racism, or ageism. However, even if you were discriminated against, proving it in court is difficult.

Tom considered himself a macho man. He did not know that his employees considered him a jerk. They made fun of him behind his back. They called him Tommy Troll because he was short and mean and had no manners. Never once had anyone heard Tom use the words Please, Thank You, Excuse Me, or I'm Sorry.

Everyone wanted to attend his funeral. But that wasn't going to happen soon. After his last physical, he presented his blood test report at a weekly staff meeting. Every item on that report was within the acceptable range. "The doctor said I'll live to be 100," he said proudly, immediately depressing most of the employees.

Tom played golf every Sunday with some other supervisors. He was a bad golfer, but he thought he was good. He liked to joke around and make fun of other golfers. On the first tee last Sunday, Tom joked about a golfer who had just teed off: "Look at that guy. He swings like a girl." Tom laughed heartily at his own joke. His buddies were silent.

"What did you say?" asked the golfer angrily. He had overheard Tom's remark. He was a mean-looking man.

"Uh, nothing," Tom said.

"Yes, you did. You said I swing like a girl. Now I've got something to say. You apologize like a good little girl, or I'll give you a fresh knuckle sandwich."

In front of his golf buddies, Tom meekly apologized. After only nine holes, during which Tom was unusually quiet, he excused himself and went home. He said he had a headache. But his friends thought it was shame that was eating at him. The next day, Tom was still upset. He told Bill to report to his office. He had never liked Bill. He always wondered why he had hired him in the first place.

"I'm letting you go. I don't need you here. Your last day is Friday."

Bill wasn't surprised. Saying nothing, he spat on Tom's desk and walked out.

88. Take Me Out to the Ball Game

Ralph and Ilene hadn't been to a baseball game in about five years. They were only 15 miles from the stadium, but the heavy traffic on game day made those 15 miles seem more like 60 miles. It took about an hour to get to the stadium. Then, when the game was over, it took half an hour just to get out of the parking lot. Then the drive home was another hour. In other words, the traveling took longer than the game itself.

"Honey, the Giants are in town," Ilene said. "I want to see Barry Bonds hit a home run. Can we go to the game? We haven't gone in such a long time."

"You're right. It has been a while. OK, I'll go if you don't mind driving," said Ralph.

"Great! Let's get ready. If we get there early enough, I might get his autograph. Maybe he'll hit a foul ball we can catch." Ilene was excited. "We!?" Ralph thought.

An hour later they were in their car. They lived in Pasadena near an old church. They went south on Orange Grove and then south on the 110 freeway. The 110 is California's original freeway, full of twists and turns. Accidents occur daily; California drivers think yellow lights and sharp curves mean the same thing—speed up!

The traffic was lighter than they expected. They arrived at the stadium 40 minutes before game time. They paid the \$8 parking fee, parked and locked the car, and walked to the main entrance.

Several individuals were standing around outside the stadium, looking casual but actually selling tickets on the sly. "Are you going to buy from a scalper?" asked Ilene.

"Yes. Just like last time. That one looks honest," Ralph replied.

They walked over to a man in a red cap. Ralph's instincts were correct. The man had tickets for good seats at a fair price. Ralph gave the man \$45 and thanked him.

"Don't thank me, my friend. Thank your local police department. Put your hands behind your back, please. You're under arrest."

"What?" Ralph was astonished. "What's going on?"

"Buying scalped tickets is illegal in Los Angeles," said the undercover police officer. "It's been illegal for 25 years. Don't worry. The police station is right outside the park. We'll have you back here right after we book you. You can pay the \$150 fine with your credit card." The officer handcuffed Ralph.

"This has got to be a joke. You people have never enforced this law before," said Ralph.

"Well, we've got a new mayor and he wants us to enforce all the laws that bring in money. Come with me, please. I'll have you back here in 20 minutes. Ma'am, you can wait here for him. You might want to buy some legitimate tickets while you're waiting. Have a nice day. Oh, and enjoy the game!"

89. Take This Job and Shove It

Maxwell had not held a steady job in almost two years. Today was a big day, because he was going to a job interview that he felt good about. The secretary he had talked to on the phone sounded friendly and encouraging.

Maxwell was a typist. His fingers danced on the keyboard. However, his people skills were not nearly as good as his typing skills. Sometimes his mouth got in the way of his employment. At his last steady job, his boss had told him to start making coffee every morning. Maxwell laughed. "I'm not making coffee," he said. "It's not part of my job description."

"Read the employee manual again," his boss said. "Your job description is anything I say it is."

"That's a woman's job," said Maxwell. "Do it yourself."

His boss was still yelling as Maxwell walked out of the building. He felt great about telling off the boss. A few days later, the reality of not having a job hit home. He had to pay the rent and utility bills, and he had to eat. What was he going to do?

He thought about apologizing and asking for his job back. But how would that look? Then again, who cares how it looks when you're almost broke? After thinking about it for another week, he finally called his boss and apologized. His boss accepted his apology, but said that he had already hired a replacement.

Maxwell contacted a temporary job agency, which provided him enough occasional work to pay his bills. But none of the companies that he was sent to were hiring. So Maxwell was excited about finally getting an interview for a steady job.

Maxwell's drive to the interview was disappointing. The traffic was congested and the neighborhood looked rough. It took him 45 minutes to get there. The building was covered with graffiti.

The interview started 30 minutes late. Not bothering to apologize, the manager lit a cigarette and took a sip from his coffee cup. He leaned back in his chair and put his feet up on his desk. He asked Maxwell a lot of questions. Maxwell thought that each question was stupider than the preceding question. The final question was, "Where would you like to be 10 years from now?"

What does that have to do with typing? Maxwell wondered. Stupid questions from a rude man in a lousy neighborhood! Where would he like to be 10 years from now?

"Anywhere but this dump!" Maxwell said angrily, as he stood up and walked out.

90. Where Did That Book Go?

Samuel was back at the thrift shop. He had walked into the shop with only one goal in mind—to find a book that he had NOT bought yesterday. The book was one of seven that he had piled up yesterday. He was going to buy all of them. But at the last moment, he changed his mind. He put all seven back on the shelf.

Samuel had a personal library at home that exceeded 1,000 books—almost all unread. He subscribed to seven magazines and one daily newspaper. Samuel had more reading material in his small apartment than he could finish in two lifetimes, yet his urge to buy more books raged on.

He finally put his foot down. Not one more book, he told himself, unless it was really special. Yesterday's book fit the bill. It was a biography of one of his favorite authors—Stephen King. King is one of America's most popular fiction authors. But it wasn't easy for King; early in his career, he got hundreds of rejection slips. Samuel wanted to be a great writer. King was his role model.

Samuel immediately found one of the books he had piled up yesterday, and then another one. All right, he thought. This was going to be easy. In minutes, he found all the books that he had held in his hands yesterday, except one—the Stephen King book. Gee, what a surprise, he thought. The one book that I want to find is the one book that I can't find.

Samuel took a walk throughout the store, knowing that people often pick up merchandise in one place and then leave it in another place. The book was a thick paperback with a red cover. But it was nowhere to be found.

So for Samuel, the Big Hunt was on. He was now a man on a mission. Every thrift shop he went to would involve a search for the King book. This new search added purpose to his thrift shop life.

Samuel had held something special in his hands. But only when he let it go did he realize its value. When he found it again, he would place the King book prominently on his bookshelf. It would almost certainly be his favorite book that he never got around to reading.

91. When You've Got Your Health, You've Got Everything

Hannah's daddy was a teacher who barely made enough money to raise his six kids. Hannah wore hand-me-downs from her older sisters. For Christmas she usually got used dolls and books. As a child, she yearned to have the beautiful clothes, cars, and homes that she often saw on TV and in magazines.

Several years after she graduated from college, she became part-owner of a successful interior decorating business in Manhattan. Her life became what she had dreamed about as a little girl. A successful business woman, she had a handsome, wealthy fiancé. She owned her own co-op near Central Park. She took skiing vacations in the winter and exotic cruises in the summer. At the age of 30, Hannah was on top of the world.

Then she underwent a routine health checkup, and her perfect world crumbled. Her doctor told her that she had pancreatic cancer. Surgery was necessary to determine how much the cancer had spread. Hannah was operated on a week later. The surgeon suspected that cancer had spread to vital organs. Ten days later, the lab confirmed his suspicions.

Hannah's doctor said he could treat her with chemotherapy and painkillers, but it was just a matter of time before the cancer killed her. She asked how much time. He guessed that she had less than a year to live. How can this be, Hannah wondered. Doesn't this always happen to someone else?

A couple of weeks later, she visited another cancer specialist. He examined her and read her medical and lab reports. He said he agreed with her surgeon. "If you have any once-in-a-lifetime plans, do them now," he advised.

Instead, Hannah spent her last months in her co-op, tended to by hospice workers. Her family and friends visited her regularly. The moment before she died, she opened her eyes and tried to say something to her fiancé. She squeezed his hand weakly.

"She was in constant pain," her fiancé said. "At the end, she could barely whisper. She weighed 80 pounds when she died. I can't believe that God allows things like this to happen to people."

92. It Doesn't Have That 'New Car' Smell

Dylan's car was 20 years old, but the faded paint made it look even older. His friend Joe told him no girl would ever go out in a car that looked like that. So Dylan took the car to a paint shop and got it painted dark blue for only \$200. He was very pleased with the new look. The car stereo did not work. Joe told him that no girl wanted to be in a car without a good sound system. So Dylan bought a nice stereo and installed it himself.

Months went by. One day, Dylan told Joe that no girl had ridden in his "new" car yet. "That's because there are other problems," Joe told him. "Like what?" "Well, you don't exactly have the world's best personality," Joe said. "That's a little more important than a paint job." So Dylan told Joe he would ask a psychologist to give him a new personality.

Recently, Dylan had a new problem—gasoline. He smelled gas after he started his car; he smelled it while driving the car. Was he driving a bomb? What if someone tossed out a cigarette near his car? Would it explode into a thousand pieces—pieces that included Dylan?

That night, he opened his car manual. It was a well-thumbed book. He had a car problem at least once a month, and he was always looking up ways to fix the problems. He thought this might be a carburetor problem.

The next day, he took his toolbox out to his car. He opened the hood. He started up the car and looked all around the carburetor for a gas leak. He could smell the gas, but he couldn't find a liquid trail. After a few minutes, however, he found the source of the problem. It was the fuel line.

"All right!" he thought. "All I have to do is buy a new line and install it." But it wasn't long before he realized that this was a job for a mechanic. So he got into his car, opened all the windows, and drove to the closest mechanic. The mechanic quoted Dylan a price of only \$50. He told Dylan to come back in an hour.

Dylan walked down the street to the coffee shop and bought himself a cup of coffee. He read the paper, drank the coffee, and then walked back to the shop.

"We couldn't fix it," said the mechanic. "The fuel line wasn't the problem; you need a new fuel pump."

"A new fuel pump? How much is that?" Dylan asked.

"Parts and labor? I think it'll be about \$200. We'll have to special-order the pump. This car is so old that they might not even make pumps for it any more. Do you want me to try to order it for you? You'll have to put the money up first, of course."

"Let me think about it. Here's the \$50 I owe you. I'll give you a call when I decide what to do."

But Dylan had already decided what to do. He had bought his car for only \$1,100, but had put over \$3,000 into it since then. When he got home, he called the Car Donation Corporation. They would take the car off his hands for free. Enough was enough. It was time to let go.

93. Rich Man Invites Poor Student to Dinner

Jodie liked her apartment. She had a beautiful view to the south. A nearby tree was home to two squirrels. She liked to watch them. So did her cat. Mrs. Neely owned the apartment building. She was an old lady who spoke with a thick Norwegian accent.

Jodie and Mrs. Neely got along very well. Mrs. Neely said that Jodie reminded her of her daughter, who had died in a car crash years ago. Mrs. Neely was a widow. She kept busy by volunteering at the local library and senior center. An excellent baker, she often brought bread and pastries to Jodie.

"You're trying to make me fat," laughed Jodie one day. "How will I ever find a boyfriend?"

"I still can't believe that Prince Charming hasn't found you," said Mrs. Neely. "Maybe you're just too pretty and too smart for the young men around here."

Jodie was going to graduate school at night. She had a day job as a teacher's assistant in the fourth grade. She loved teaching kids. The principal had already told her that a full-time teaching job was hers after she got her master's degree.

"Aren't there any nice boys in your graduate classes, Jodie?" Mrs. Neely asked.

"There are some," said Jodie. "But they're either married, or have a girlfriend, or are too focused on getting their degree. And don't forget, I have to concentrate on graduating, so I really shouldn't be dating anyway."

"Well, that's just a shame," said Mrs. Neely. "You're too pretty to be alone. But don't worry. You keep doing your homework, and I'll be on the lookout for you." She winked at Jodie. Jodie smiled. She loved Mrs. Neely.

Mrs. Neely died not long after that conversation. She had a stroke while mixing some batter for cookies. An ambulance took her to the hospital, where she died a day later.

Her son Ned was Mrs. Neely's sole heir. Ned had been married and divorced three times. None of his wives had anything nice to say about him. Ned didn't care. He was looking for Wife Number Four.

Ned introduced himself to Jodie right after Mrs. Neely's funeral on Saturday. He knew about Jodie because Mrs. Neely had told him about her. Ned said he was afraid that he might have to double her rent. Also, no pets were allowed in the building. "You'll have to take your cat to the pound," he said.

"In that case," she said, "I'm moving out."

"I was joking, of course. You're very pretty," said Ned.

"Thank you," said Jodie.

"Come to dinner with me at Chez Maison tonight and we can discuss your apartment and your cat." Ned had an air of confidence that Jodie found mildly attractive.

"That might be nice," she found herself saying. Ned told her he would pick her up at 8 and left. Jodie wondered if she was doing the right thing. She didn't even know this guy. Oh well, she thought, it would be nice to eat at a fancy restaurant for a change.

She picked up some cat food on her way home.

94. It Only Rings When I'm in the Bathroom

Uncle Harry had no answering machine because hardly anyone ever called. Most of his friends and relatives were already dead. He had outlived them all, even though he smoked and drank most of his life. So much for all their talk about clean living, he sometimes thought.

The only person who talked to Uncle Harry regularly was his nephew Teddy. Teddy called several times a week, just for a few minutes to say hello and see if everything was OK. Some days Teddy had to call twice or more because Uncle Harry didn't answer the first phone call. When he finally did get through, Uncle Harry would chastise Teddy for his bad timing. "How do you always manage to call me when I'm in the bathroom?" he would ask.

Tuesday morning, Teddy let the phone ring ten times. He then hung up and went back to work. That afternoon he called Uncle Harry again. Again, no answer. A couple of hours later, he called again. Still no answer. He called Ira, Uncle Harry's next-door neighbor.

"Hello," said Ira.

"Hi, Ira, this is Teddy."

"Hi, Teddy. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine, Ira. But I'm a little worried about Uncle Harry. I called him three times today and he didn't answer once. I don't think he could have been in the bathroom all three times, do you?"

"No, I don't think so," laughed Ira. "He does complain about that, doesn't he? Anyway, I'll go next door and see what's up. If he doesn't open the door, I know where he hides his spare key. I'll call you back in a bit, okay?"

"Okay, Ira. Thanks a lot," Teddy said.

A while later, Teddy's phone rang. It was Ira. He sounded shaken. "Teddy, I'm sorry it took so long. I have bad news. Harry didn't answer the door, so I used his spare key. He was dead, Teddy. I'm sorry."

"Oh, my gosh! That's terrible!"

"I called the hospital, and they told me to call the coroner's office. The coroner said they were busy, and wouldn't be able to make it here until tomorrow or the day after."

"What happened? Did he fall? Did he die in his sleep? Is he lying on the bed with a peaceful look on his face?"

"Not exactly, Teddy. He's lying on the bathroom floor with a look of surprise on his face. We can move him to his bed later. But right now I've got to go home, Teddy. I think I might be in shock or something. I don't feel right."

95. It Was an Old, Worthless Clock

It was an old clock, but it still told the correct time. The face had a faded picture of Andy's parents taken when they were newlyweds. Aside from some photos, the clock was the only memento Andy had of his mom and dad.

His father died of cancer in 1964. Then his mom moved to a private nursing home. She had many friends there. The nursing home, however, went bankrupt. They moved her into a state nursing home. She hated it there.

She asked Andy to help her move into a private nursing home again. She had spent most of her husband's savings on living expenses at the first nursing home. Andy said he would try.

But Andy had no savings. He was a sergeant in the Army, and all his money went to his wife and three kids. He called his older brother Frank, who was single and had a great job. Frank was an avid deep-sea fisherman and was interested in buying a large boat for weekend use.

"Frank, I don't have the money now, but you do," Andy pleaded. "Just pay for Mom and I'll owe you for half of the nursing home costs."

"You'll owe me? You don't have two nickels to rub together, and probably never will. I'll get stuck for the whole bill. What about my boat?"

"What boat?"

"Never mind. Let me think about it, and I'll get back to you."

Frank never did send his mom the money to move into a private nursing home. Alone and unhappy, she died in the state nursing home only a year later. Andy never forgave his brother.

Many years went by. Frank's health declined. He called up Andy one day. "Andy, I feel really bad about not helping out Mom. I was too interested in getting that boat. The older I've gotten, the more guilt I feel. My days are numbered, Andy. I was wondering if you would send me that clock, just for a little while. I want to beg Mom to forgive me."

Andy was very reluctant to part with his clock, but he did feel a little sorry for Frank.

Frank died ten months later. One of Frank's nieces, Flo, was the executor of his estate. Flo had hired a lawyer to help her Uncle Frank rewrite his will in his dying days. Strangely enough, Flo got everything.

She made sure Uncle Frank was buried a day after his death. No announcement was made about his funeral, which Flo kept private—at the 20-minute service, Flo was the only mourner. Flo sold Uncle Frank's house, car, and boat within the week. Everything of lesser value went to a charity. His cash and stocks, of course, were already safely in her name.

When Andy discovered that his brother had died, he called Flo to ask about his clock. "Oh," she said, "that went to charity with everything else. You didn't really want that old thing, did you, Uncle Andy? Uncle Andy? Hello?" Well, that was rude, she thought.

96. Schoolboys Get Five-Finger Discount on Candy

Travis and Paul were best friends and in the ninth grade. They didn't like anything about school except the girls and the baseball. They were both on the junior high baseball team. Both wanted to be major league baseball players when they grew up.

On Thursday, baseball practice lasted for two hours after school. After practice, Travis and Paul were hungry and thirsty. Between them, they had \$2.05. There was a small grocery store three blocks from the school.

"What can we buy for only \$2?" asked Travis.

"We could split a soda and a candy bar," replied Paul.

"That's going to be hard to do, since I like orange soda and you like root beer," said Travis. "And I hate peanuts in candy bars and you love them," said Paul.

As they approached the store, they were still thinking about their problem. One solution, of course, was for one of them to pick the soda and the other to pick the candy bar. The problem with that solution would be that one of them would still be thirsty and the other would still be hungry.

"Wait a minute," said Paul. "I've got an idea." They stopped, and Paul told Travis his idea.

Mr. Cobb was the store owner. He had no use for kids. They were little people with little money. His eyes narrowed as he saw the boys approaching the store.

After they entered the store, Travis walked over to the big cooler that was filled with ice and sodas. Paul walked over to the candy bar section.

"Mr. Cobb, you don't have any orange soda," Travis said.

"Yes, I do. Just dig a little. You'll find one."

Travis dug for a minute.

"I still can't find one."

"Are you blind? I'll be right there."

Mr. Cobb started digging through the ice. Paul immediately put two candy bars into his trousers' baggy pockets. He patted the pockets down a little bit.

"Look! Orange soda! What did I tell you?"

"Thank you, sir," Travis said.

As Travis was paying for the orange soda and the root beer, Mr. Cobb looked at Paul.

"You're not buying anything?"

"No, sir. We just wanted some sodas."

"Then why were you looking at the candy bars?"

"Just to see if you got any new brands, sir." Mr. Cobb's narrow eyes got narrower as they moved slowly from Paul's eyes to his shirt, to his pants, and to his shoes.

"If I ever catch you stealing from me, I'll chop off your hands, you hear me?" For emphasis, Mr. Cobb reached down beneath the countertop and pulled out a butcher knife, sharp and shiny.

Both boys were startled. They ran out of the store.

"Come back here. You forgot your change!" Mr. Cobb yelled at them.

97. Collecting Seashells at the Seashore

Maria and Lisa were best friends. They shared a two-bedroom apartment in Hollywood. Maria was a clerk at a clothing store, and Lisa was a clerk at a supermarket. Their hours varied, so they didn't get to spend a whole lot of time together. But last weekend both were off work. "Let's go to the beach," suggested Maria.

"That's a good idea," agreed Lisa. "Which one?"

"Well, I would prefer an uncrowded beach, because I think I've put on a few pounds recently. I don't want any boys seeing my fat."

"Oh, please," said Lisa. "You eat so little. Ounces don't turn into pounds. How about Zuma Beach? That's pretty far north of Santa Monica Beach, so it's just right—not too crowded and not too empty."

"That sounds good," said Maria.

The drive to the beach took more than an hour. When they got there, the hot and sunny Hollywood weather had become cool, windy, and overcast beach weather. Both of them had been to the beach many times before, so they were not surprised by the change in weather. They put on their jackets, shoes, and socks, and headed north to hunt for seashells.

Within an hour they had collected about 20 beautiful shells into a plastic bag. They were still walking slowly north when they heard a roar. They turned around to see a four-wheel All Terrain Vehicle coming rapidly toward them. The driver braked at the last moment. Sand flew onto the two girls. They both screamed.

The driver was wearing a jacket that said Beach Patrol. He got off the ATV and started yelling at them. "What are you two doing here? Can't you read? The signs say Private Property. They say No Trespassing. Get out of here before I write you a ticket and have you arrested."

"What's your name?" Maria stood defiantly. "I'm going to report you to the police. You're not a real patrol officer. This is a public beach. Those signs are phony signs put up by homeowners who think they own the beach."

"My name is John Smith. Report me to whoever you want. Now get out of here or you'll be sorry."

"You can't make us leave. This is a public beach!" yelled Maria.

The man got back onto his ATV and started driving in circles around the women. The ATV was spraying sand and water all over them. He was laughing. They started running back south. When the ATV driver saw that they were leaving, he drove off.

"John Smith. A phony name to go with a phony uniform," said Maria when they slowed down to a walk. "We're going to the police station and make a complaint. I hope they put him in jail."

A few minutes later, Lisa asked, "Where are the shells?"

"Oh, gee, in all the excitement I left them back there. I'm sorry."

"No problem," replied Lisa. "There's plenty of seashells in the sea."

"Yeah, just like there's plenty of jerks on the shore."

98. Check Your Bags at the Store Entrance

Adrian's favorite store was the \$1 Store. This store had everything, from fresh produce to birthday cards to gasoline additives. Everything was one dollar. Usually, he got very good deals; occasionally, he got ripped off.

A few days ago, Adrian bought six packages of ink for his printer. Then he found a deal on better ink at the local computer store. So Adrian went back to the \$1 Store to exchange the ink for some other items.

He put the ink into a plastic bag and tied it up. When he entered the store, he immediately showed the bag to a clerk and told her that he was returning some items. She looked at him but said nothing. There were about ten people in her line. She was obviously very busy. Not knowing exactly what to do, Adrian put the bag into a push-cart and started shopping.

He was midway through shopping when a female employee suddenly stopped him. "Sir," she said sternly, "you are not allowed to carry a plastic bag of items around in this store. What's in this bag? Show me what's in the bag!"

Adrian was taken aback. There was no need for her to yell. He opened the bag and showed her the six packages of ink. "I'm returning these to exchange for some other items," Adrian said.

"You should have left the bag with the clerk when you entered this store. Let me see your receipt!" the employee demanded.

Adrian was embarrassed. He felt like a shoplifter. He looked around to see if anyone was paying attention. He showed her the receipt.

"Perhaps in the future you'll learn how to follow store policy. Leave this bag here with the clerk. You can have your receipt and bag back when you check out."

By the time Adrian had finished shopping and exchanged the items, he was angry. How dare she treat him like a criminal? He went looking for her. He wanted an apology. He found her in the produce section and asked what her name was. She mumbled something. He asked her again, and this time he heard "Ursula."

"Ursula what?" he asked. She yelled at him, "Ursula!" and stormed away.

When Adrian got home, he called the store's corporate headquarters. This rude employee was about to lose her job, he said to himself. He described his unpleasant experience to a customer service representative. She was sympathetic. "Our employees are taught to be polite. We will not tolerate such behavior. Give me your phone number and I will call you back."

Two days later, Adrian received a phone call from the representative. "I'm sorry," she said, "but there's no one at that store named Ursula. Can you describe her? I'll find out who she is. I assure you, we do not tolerate rude behavior, nor do we tolerate lying to customers."

By this time, Adrian had calmed down. He didn't really want the employee to lose her job. He told the representative to forget about it.

99. When I Retire, We Will See the World

It was 10 p.m. Fritz said good night to his wife. She was watching TV. He went to bed. Tomorrow was a big day. It was his last day of work. Thirty years with the federal government. Thirty years of flying out of town for weeks on end. Thirty years of interviews, meetings, and heavy briefcases. Tomorrow it would all be over. Not that he didn't like it. He had enjoyed his career.

Fritz felt blessed. His father had had a tough life as an unskilled laborer. Whenever Fritz was a bit discouraged or upset, he thought about his overworked and underpaid father. He thanked God for his own good life, and for the fact that he had been able to make his dad's last years comfortable.

His two children were married and had their own careers. His wife Paige kept busy with, among other things, her bridge club. She had tried to get him interested in bridge, but without success. Fritz was content with his own Friday night poker group.

Friday morning, he went to work for the very last time. Those who knew him well would miss him. Fritz was a genuinely nice guy. He never had a bad word to say about anyone. Some people might have thought he was a little dull, but he was intelligent, a hard worker, and a team player. He had taken only three weeks of sick leave in 30 years.

A small group took him out to lunch. When he returned from lunch, the whole office gathered around for cake, ice cream, a farewell card, and a few short speeches. They presented him with various going-away gifts, including a big, paperback US atlas. It listed all the motels, campgrounds, national parks, tourist spots, and other information to help guide a leisurely traveler throughout the good old USA. He had told his friends that he and Paige were going to spend a couple of years visiting all the places that he never had gotten to explore while there on business. As a final gift, his supervisor told him to take the rest of the day off.

Paige's car wasn't in the driveway when he got home. She was probably shopping for some traveling clothes. Maybe she was out arranging a dinner at a restaurant that evening for just the two of them. That would be nice.

But something was wrong. When he hung up his jacket, he saw that the bedroom closet was half empty. Paige's clothes were gone. Her shoes were not on the closet floor. Confused, he looked around the bedroom.

He saw an envelope on the lamp stand. Inside it were two pieces of paper. One notified him of a divorce proceeding. The other was a hand-written note from Paige. "I'm so sorry," it began. She said that her lawyer had told her to wait until today. If she had sought divorce a year earlier, like her boyfriend had suggested, she would not have been able to qualify for 50 percent of Fritz's pension. She hoped that he would find it in his heart to forgive her. She felt terrible about this, she wrote, because "you've been so good to me. But I can't ignore my own heart."

Fritz sat immobile on the edge of the bed. Her note was in his hand; her words were burning in his brain.

Maybe an hour later, the phone rang. He picked it up on the fifth ring. It was Bob, wondering if Fritz was going to play poker later that night.

100. Get Me a Caffe Latte or Go to Jail

On Friday afternoon a judge sentenced lawyer Mickey Mantle to 24 hours in jail for contempt. Mantle had just won a lawsuit against a man who had struck Mantle's client. The client had accidentally spilled a diet soda onto the defendant's new sneakers, so he broke the client's jaw. The judge sentenced the defendant to two years in jail for assault and battery. But after handcuffing the defendant, the sheriff's deputy also handcuffed Mantle. "What the heck do you think you're doing?" Mantle shouted.

"Sorry. Judge's orders," replied the deputy, as he escorted Mantle and the defendant out of the courtroom. "She said to throw you in jail overnight for contempt of court." Because the judge had already left the courtroom, Mantle had no one to protest to.

Mantle and the convicted man were put in the back of the same van and driven five miles to the city jail. When they were taken out of the van, Mantle had a black eye and a bloody nose. He told the deputy that the defendant had head-butted him. The defendant called Mantle a liar. He told the deputy that Mantle had gone flying when the van made a sharp turn and banged his face on the defendant's knee.

The deputy took Mantle to the jail emergency room. Mantle couldn't believe what was going on. He was a respected lawyer about to spend the night in jail with violent criminals, some of whom he'd helped to convict. He'd be lucky to get out alive. And all because of a stupid cup of coffee.

Mantle was in jail because he had displeased Judge Brown. Brown had asked Mantle to bring her a caffe latte from Moonbucks on Mantle's way back from lunch. Mantle had had previous run-ins with Brown. He didn't like Brown, and refused to be her errand boy. When Mantle returned from lunch, she asked him where her coffee was. Mantle said, "They ran out. They said to come back tomorrow."