Door Knob

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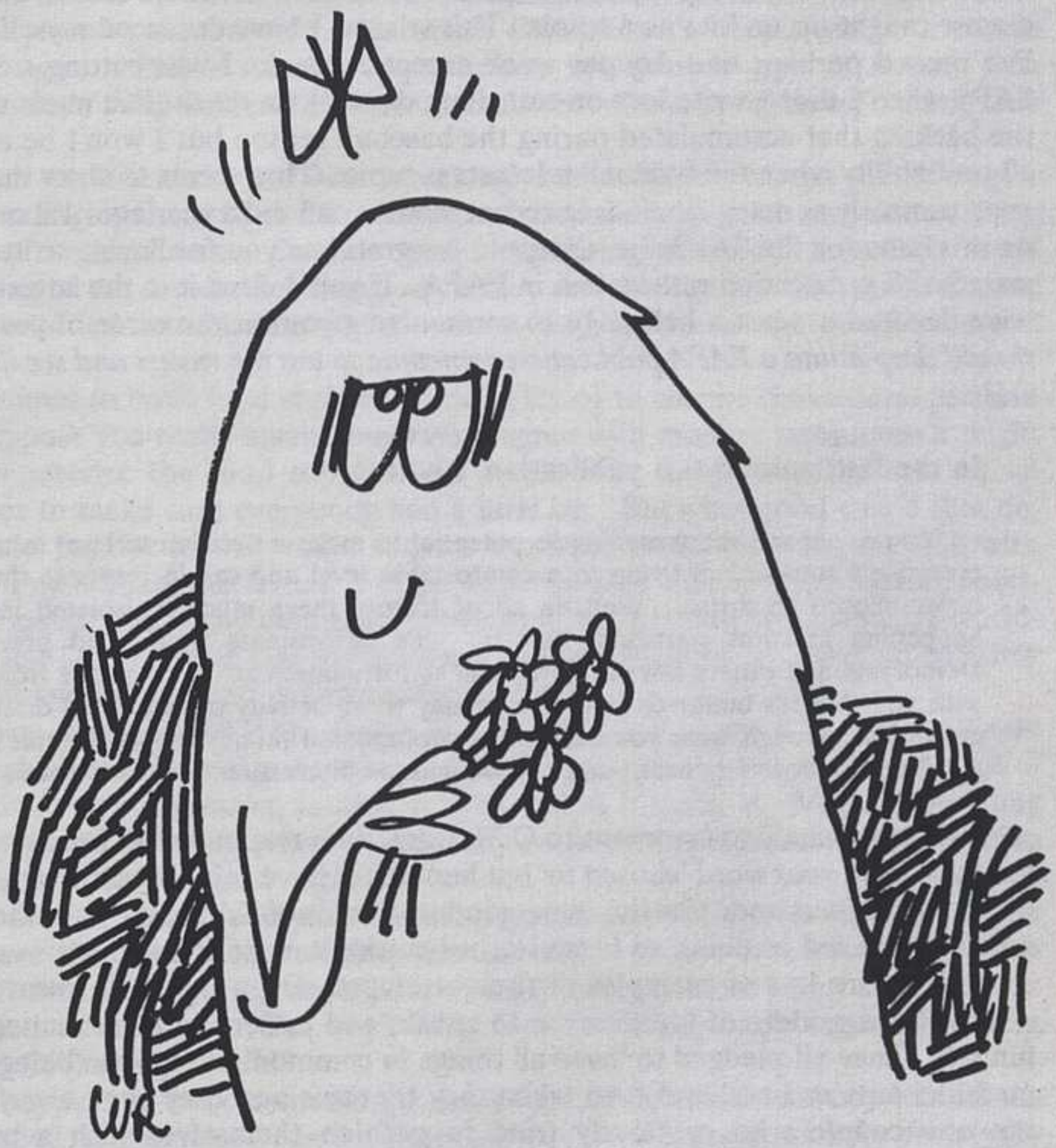

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Because I will be on my TAFF trip during the time I would normally be bashing away at my SAPSzine, this time I'm doing it early. It's Monday, January 23, 1989. San Francisco is the home of the Super Bowl champions (big deal) and George Bush is calling for the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark Supreme Court decision permitting abortion. I guess a kinder, gentler nation--one with freedom of choice about such deeply personal matters--is on the ash heap already for American women. Will the "thousand points of light" become flashlights used in "back alley" abortions if George has his way?

In the mail today, among other things, were two letters of comment on the last issue of this furlong stanzine, which I want to share with you now. First, **Harry Warner Jr.** writes: "Your statistics on fanzines received are encouraging in the sense that possibly the decline in fanzine production has been arrested at least for a while. I haven't done any counting but circumstantial evidence seems to show my own fanzine-getting experience has been similar to yours. As I wrote a while back in RIP FAN WINKLE, I became obsessive last winter and wrote a loc virtually every day over a span of about four months between baseball seasons, and almost caught up on locs as a result. This winter, I haven't forced myself to do it every day. I've missed perhaps one day per week except in weeks I was cutting stencils for FAPA or SAPS when I didn't write locs on stenciling days. As a result, I've made up some ground on the backlog that accumulated during the baseball season but I won't be almost caught up in all probability when the baseball telecasts resume. That seems to show that I've been getting approximately as many fanzines in recent months as I did a year ago. I'll save other comments on this issue for the SAPSzine, except to congratulate you for having written 'preventative' in your SAPS publication rather than in FAPA. If you'd done it in the latter place, Speer would have devoted at least a half-page to sermonizing you on the error of your ways." *Perhaps I should drop it into a FAPA publication sometime to test the waters and see if Jack has mellowed yet?*

In the last issue of this publication, I wrote:

> You quote me about mankind's potential to make a decision to level income to bring up everyone's standard of living to a comfortable level and say in response that mankind has never chosen to do so. Well, in all of history there must be isolated instances of that happening in some particular culture. It's unfortunate that greed prevails. Liberals, Democrats and others can all regret that unfortunateness. On another front, I quite agree with you that it's better to give your money to an activity or individual directly rather than channel it through what you call "some professional money-raising scheme" where most is siphoned off for "expenses," and to give with as much direct involvement as possible.

This was a mailing comment to **G.M. Carr**, who responded as follows: "Perhaps I should not have used your word 'chosen to' but had better have said that although mankind may have tried to give everybody else the same good standards of living they have themselves, they have never succeeded in doing so because they couldn't make it stick.

"There are lots of examples of their attempts. Even the Bible records the first church --hot off the griddle of idealism, so to speak, and under the direct supervision of St. Peter himself. They all pledged to 'have all things in common' but human beings are not programmed like ants or bees, and even when they try their best they can't always hack it. Look at the one couple who cautiously tried to cushion themselves with a private nest-egg by withholding a part of the proceeds of the sale of all their property, donating all the rest to the Brotherhood. They were greeted with such a blast of outrage and anger upon the exposure of this human trait that they died of shock. The Church also nearly broke up over charges of favoritism and/or neglect after it got so big it could no longer be handled by one man.

"And all during the next nearly 2,000 years of its experience although they have tried to keep up this selfless ideal of communal brother-love, they could only do it by isolated colonies of monks or nuns or isolated individuals like our modern Mother Teresa. And when you look at the administrative record of the humans who have been running it, even the most ardent believer can't claim they've been shining lights of brotherly love or idealism! Humans just aren't programmed that way. *(That's for sure. I agree with you 100% there, thinking of shining examples like Jim and Tammy Bakker, Jim Swaggart, et al.)*

"Leaving Christianity aside (or at any rate, the major organized portion of it) we find many groups of one kind or another trying to get together to establish a culture that would benefit everybody equally. The Amish seem to be the most successful, at least in our time, although the Pueblo Indians seems to have been doing all right until the white man came along and impacted them so disastrously. I don't know how they are doing now, but I suspect whatever they did have isn't the same now.

"I think you overlook one fact when presenting this ideal as potentially feasible: human beings may be legally 'equal' in the eyes of the law, but they are NOT 'equal' in wanting the same things nor in their abilities. The only way in which it would be possible to give every human being as much as every other human being has, would be if every human being *wanted* the same things as everybody else. But people don't. As I said, humans just are not programmed like ants or bees. Even if there was enough of everything to share with the whole world, there would be some humans who just couldn't live with it. Malcontents who have to get out of it or curl up and die. Like the Amish kids who move out into 'the world.' But if there *was* no place to move out to, what then? One person's Utopia can be another's prison. *(Again, I agree. People should have a choice of life style--type of shelter, food preferences, all that sort of thing--but overall no one need live a whole lot higher off the hog than anyone else.)*

"But now we can see that there just are not enough resources left on this planet to give every human on it now (let alone 10 or 20 or 50 years from now) the same standard of living that is customary in 'civilized' areas. So what would 'equalizing' everybody mean? It would mean such a lowering of the standard of living universally that the aborigines of Australia and Africa would be crowded into tenements like slums and so would the Americans and Europeans.

"Even when it comes to basic food supplies, without trying to change the cultural patterns (which is what I suppose you really meant, anyway), I agree with modern techniques it might be possible to computerize the food supplies and world-wide hungry mouths and set up distribution facilities to make sure everybody had a little bit. But what good would that do, really? Who would pay for it? It would require a central world-wide organization with dictatorial powers. Possibly, computer-run, it might be possible to eliminate the human/political factors of graft, greed, snafus and deliberate subversion, but it would require such a world-wide dictatorship that I don't think you would like it and the majority of mankind certainly wouldn't! Again, humans just aren't programmed that way.

"I don't think you are a stupid man, Bob. In fact, I think you are a highly intelligent person and, within the framework of your value system, a highly motivated person. A man of integrity. But I think you are refusing to look at mankind as it really is. Maybe I'm wrong and you are more aware of humanity's faults than I am, but just more determined than I when it comes to insisting on how mankind *ought* to be.

"Humans *ought* to share their food with the starving; humans *ought* to work hard so that the poor would have the good things of life; humans *ought* to give free medical help to everybody even if it means everybody has to work harder and pay more taxes and have less comforts. Well, that is a nice idea. But why? Why should anybody *ought* to do something that somebody else thinks they should?

"I don't like being pushed to do something I don't want to do that somebody else thinks I *ought* to do. Do you? *(Not unless it can be adequately explained to me that it's for the greater good of mankind, which in this case I believe it is.)* Humans are motivated to do things for their own self-interest. And it doesn't do any good to say they *ought* to be motivated to do good for somebody else. So why insist? Of course, if nobody did any good disinterestedly, mankind would never have gotten where it is. But there is a difference between wanting to

do good and being required to do good because one *ought* to do it, isn't there? Well, here I am, rambling again.

"P.S. Just thought of something: Liberals want the government to 'do-good' for everybody, especially poor, handicapped and underprivileged. Conservatives want the government to stop people from being BAD, so there won't be so many poor, handicapped and underprivileged. We both want the same thing, but dislike the other's way of doing it. Is that the difference?"

No, Gertrude, the difference is that Liberals (at least this one) don't agree with those Conservatives who think the poor, handicapped and underprivileged are, to use your word, "BAD." (And what is it, Gertrude, that the handicapped in particular do that makes them qualify for "BAD"ness?) I am well aware of all the failures of human nature and behavior you cite, and while I may be able to work up some righteous indignation about it, I am unable to apply the word "BAD," merely under-enlightened. I don't think the world standard of living would fall drastically if living standards were narrowed towards the center. You think of this as austere, even dire. I think of it as comfortable but not extravagant. There is so much wealth concentrated in so few people, world-wide, that if it were freed up (and work made available to everyone who wanted it at a wage with a narrower band-width than is now the custom), everyone would have enough to go around of a basic (but not austere) standard of living. The cultural and regional differences as to what is Way Cool by way of housing, food, etc., would be no issue by simply allowing choice. If the Yakima Indians want to live in traditional lodges, let 'em. If Americans (or Italians, or Cambodians, or Peruvians) want to live in condos, let 'em. Just keep it all relatively affordable to everyone. There would still be enough room in this bandwidth for many (perhaps even most) people to have some fancy personal accessories in their lives--I like my computer hardware and software; another person might want a speed boat or a fancy set of golf clubs. I think that's reasonable and quite possible. What would disappear would be things like Rolls Royces, houses built to the size of one's ego rather than true human scale, "lifestyles of the rich and famous," grinding poverty in many parts of the world, and people living and dying in the streets in the most extreme circumstances. Those extremes would go away. Except for those who "enjoyed" them (both the "good" and the "bad" of them), no one will really miss them.

We can expect the upper financial echelons of the world to convulse as their monetary empires contract, but they are in the minority numerically. I think if this sort of change took place peacefully, in a generation or two the sort of aggressiveness in mankind that's from years of always having to "look out for number one" would be rechanneled into creative efforts, mental kung-fu on worldwide computer nets, and that much-written-of (in some science fiction) world of peace and plenty for mankind. Well, this will probably cause you to write me off as a total loony or perhaps (as I like to think) a visionary hip technocrat with soul, but I just think of myself as not being inhibited in expressing my highest vision. I don't have any idea of how to pull it off. Yet. Perhaps when my children are all raised and off on their own, I can expand my field of maintenance out beyond them to a larger human spectrum.

So stay tuned.

TIME HAS SLIPPED ON by since the above was written and typeset in January, and now it's March 7th and only ten days before I leave on my TAFF trip. All my basic travel plans have long been finalized and tickets are in hand. I fly out of San Francisco April 18th and arrive in London the following day. There's a curious stop in Seattle for an hour where they board more passengers; all advance information has it that I won't even be let out of the plane, but if I can get out I'll spend my time calling various local fans. My trip back is non-stop and both trips are over the north pole. I hope to be sleeping through much of my trip there, as when I arrive it will be quarter to six in the morning "my" time. While in England, in addition to the convention itself, which takes place on the Isle of Jersey off the coast of France (but still curiously British territory), I will be visiting a wide array of fans whom I won't name here because the itinerary is still incomplete. I also have fantasies of making a trip out to the southwest corner of Wales and drinking in one of the pubs along the River Taf formerly frequented by Dylan Thomas. I have a few other strictly touristy interests, but that's my main one. But now space is up and I must depart. See you in July...

--RL