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Preface:

This the book form of the meandering and semi-pointless autobiographical web journal on astrofish.net.

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"Don't make me come over there."



by Kramer Wetzel

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Footnotes, book notes, boot notes, and so forth are available on the website.

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Introduction:

It was a dark and stormy night.

Tenure was what all my friends in the academic world were striving for. For me, though, after ten years on the road, I started to think of tenure as a typical expression for time.

The "Tenure" section is the odd collection of material that accumulated over the years. The lame joke is obviously mine.

"xenon" is the name of a particular pinball machine, one of the first machines with a voice, so to speak. I owned one of those pinball machines, once upon a time.

I started web-based journal in 1998, as an experiment in prose, some times, an experiment in fiction, sometimes, and sometimes, just a log of experiences. This is a yearly collection, cleaned up and edited down to the some of the more interesting bits.

Oddly enough, it should be considered like a published form a "common place book," a collection of experiences, vignettes and whatever else takes shape on the page.

by Kramer Wetzel

Tenure: Surf notes

On the Road: San Diego County, CA

Potrero, CA (Peoples' Republic of Southern California) -- So this is the weekend update from out here, and let me tell you, things are definitely strange out here. It's a different tempo for life. I drove the rent car down the hill Saturday morning to see about a paper and some gas.

"The closest gas is in Tecate," said one native.

That's Tecate, Mexico, home of the brewery. The native was trying to be helpful. He was just passing through and had a much bemused expression when he realized that I was definitely not from around here. Tecate is in another country, along with the concept that the world shifts when one goes into Mexico. Which, in case you haven't been lately, it does. Shift, that is.

But Potrero and the surrounding terrain are strangely unique for a this area. Less than 60 (sixty) miles away is the raw beat of San Diego, or as some call it, Insane Diego. That's a major population center, the heart beat of Southern California, the beach, the style, the blood boiling fast and furious-downtown, there's a few places downtown where airplanes, the big jetliners, land; and the boats coming steaming up; and there's even active rail service. So here's the activity, not even an hour away by car, and then there's the calm of Potrero.

Big difference. The wild pack of coyote howl at the moon in Potrero.

It's called the East County or the Back County or some other rural name which implies that the area is rustic and full of less than desirable people, the inbred, tailer house trash associated with places like Frontage Road, Texas; all of Oklahoma; and most of Arkansas. In

Arkansas, of course, the exceptions are Hope and Little Rock.

Rustic and rural, this is rough country along the backside of the coastal range. The actual terrain itself is a nasty form of ground cover which includes a variety of sage and wild rosemary to tough manzanita, yucca and a minimum of eleven kinds of unidentified plants with burrs and thorns. The dense undercover makes light of the fact that this is a desert.

"Pretty lush desert, not like what I was used to in Arizona," one host observed.

What isn't tough vegetation is granite. In fact, the plants exist on a thin layer of sand which nothing more than granite which has crumbled apart from age. This is an old area.

"The house at the bottom of hill, supposedly it was a stop on the old Butterfield Stage Line...."

I would tend to allow that statement a chance to wander little bit more into the mythical area rather than the reality department. The house, now no more than a four walls and a badly decaying wooden roof, looks old enough to be, by my dead reckoning, forty to fifty years old. Old granite pieces stuck together with solid looking concrete and cement, one of those structures which was assembled by hand, and only later it was bricked up in places, like plumbing was an afterthought. And electricity, too, came later. There are really two structures like that, down alongside the highway, State (Peoples' Republic) Highway 94.

"He's a got a bumpersticker, did you see it when he was up at the house, 'Pray for Me: I drive Highway 94'?"

by Kramer Wetzel

94 is a tight road, winds up from the freeway: in fact, it is part of the Southern California Freeway System at one point.

Not far from Potrero, just twenty miles or so down along 94 towards the port city of San Diego, there's the first of the encroaching civilization although it's hard to use that word when one gets rapidly used to the idea of waking at sun up and sleeping after a breath taking sunset. Like all the other towns and areas around here, the name is some hybrid Spanish-Mexican-Anglo-Indian-Native name. It means that the owners of the Urban Assault Vehicles are roaming and roving closer and closer. It won't be too much longer before Potrero is discovered.

See: this town is perfect, just far enough away from the city to make it an impossible commute, at least, an impossible commute to San Diego. It would be a pretty comfortable commute to Tecate. Matter of fact, that's the easiest population center to reach in order to get some groceries, or dinner, or a six pack. Just bring your returnable bottles with you when you go.

So: Potrero has the Mexican Frontier on one side, what some folk refer to as the Taco Curtain, a fourteen foot high iron fence. To the north is some National Forest land, all protected. There's this ten mile stretch from border to government land which is so wonderful. The Baja State of Mexico is wonderfully independent although it is showing a glut from foreign investors as new real estate developments spring up along the coast, just south of Tijuana. There goes a good thing, but then it was bound to happen.

Potrero: it's stuck halfway from no where to no where. While 94 is a fun sports car kind of a road, and it does attract a number of "crotch rocket" motorcycle riders on the weekend, the road isn't the easiest way to get into the city. Back track ten or twelve miles to the Interstate,

that's the easiest way to get to town. On a full moon kind of craziness night, the Interstate is probably the safest way to get to and from town. The easy pace of life catches on really quickly: less than twenty four hours and the tempo is the relaxed, when-ever attitude.

"It not the same thing, not now," Mick said.

"Not with the Yuppie Urban-Assault vehicles, not the gear head, you know, the ones with all the toys. Too many pieces of equipment. Just not the same," he said.

The beach may be an idyllic place to frolic, but for Mick it is also a spiritual place. He likes water, and he's a good surfer. Maybe one of the best. An Endless Summer type. To be blunt about it, Mick knows the best spots for the waves on the Baja peninsula. That's the good news. The bad news is that just about every body else has also made Mick's revelation. Where the sand is the softest, and not too hot on a summer afternoon. And where the waves roll in just right. Size and texture is important; Mick understands this. He's got a liter of Pacifico beer between his legs, and he's looking out over a beach from a small cliff, about forty-five kilometers south of Tijuana.

"Can't even get to K 38 anymore. See the signs? 'No Surfers.' It's the gear heads who screwed it up; coming down here expecting something for nothing."

The road to Ensenada is more than a coastal highway now. It's a Mexican toll-road, super-highway type of route. And the access road which isa two lane black top winding in and around, like serpent coiled around prey can take an extra twenty-five miles. Not an expedient route. Mick swigs at his beer, watching the receding tide and rolling breakers. People, predominately Anglo, are dotted along the coast line.

by Kramer Wetzel

Mick has the golden blond hair of a California boy, and yes, he does live close to San Diego. But not too close. In fact, he lives back in a little town called Potrero, population 287, elevation 2,323. Potrero is close to the thriving metropolis of San Diego, but the little town is far removed from the big city. On a calm night, and most nights are calm, when a big, full moon rises up over the mountains, the coyotes howl in huge packs, yelping away in the middle of the night.

"Doing Lunch" with Mick is different from most civilized standards. There's a lack of an air of urgency, and quite a bit of calm associated with it down in Potrero. And the closest population center, the easiest place to go to get food, is across the border in Tecate, Mexico. Fish Tacos, or maybe Carne Asada. Something like that and a cold beer or two. Part of it is the difference in ambience. I pointed that out once, the difference in ambience.

"Ambience? Can you eat it? Does it taste good?" Mick asked.

No, you can't eat it, and yes it does taste good. In fact, the lifestyle in Tecate helps add to this flavor. That's the same feeling which gets carried over towards the ocean when I was traveling with Mick. It's a good arrangement. The border people, on both sides, know that Mick is suspicious: long, surfer blond hair, clear blue eyes, usually with a cooler full of beer ("remember the limit: one six pack per adult"), a couple of surf boards in the back of an old truck, and maybe a pair of teenage boys in the back of the truck, too.

Mick has a son, now living with Mick, and Jay is a different sort of bird. He's a teenager with a camper shell full of rock and roll posters, pictures of exotic cars, and beer women. Or women from beer commercials. A normal, teenage male child. One of his friends from school is with him, too, and the friend has brought his

beat up "boogie board" along for fun as well. Both the boys sport ankle length shorts which seems to be the fashion these days, along with matching shoes, and haircuts which Mick is forced to raze the boys about.

"You look like some tribe out of National Geographic, right off the television," he teases.

Date:20 Sep 1994 to 28 Sep 1994

by Kramer Wetzel

Tenure: Delicate

So there we were, three women and myself, after working at a Psychic Fair in Midland, Texas, and we stopped at a Seven Eleven. This, by the way, is definitely not a product endorsement of any kind. It just happened to be a conveniently located store. All I wanted was some Artesia Water, naturally carbonated, or maybe, if nothing else, some Perrier. In Midland? No such luck.

The person behind the counter, a young woman from Fort Worth, was much taken aback by the fact that I had two earrings in one side. Or perhaps it was some of the other jewelry I wear on fair days, like a big seven-pointed star on a chain around my neck. Whatever it was, she did notice me. In fact, with my hair down, she was much confused by me. And she let me know.

"Two earrings? blah blah blah....." (All in a distinct West Texas drawl.) Now, I was tired, satiated from just having a fill of Mexican food and returning to the motel for some much needed rest. I did my very best to entreat and humor this poor lass from Midland or Fort Worth or wherever, by reminding her that I was "sweet, innocent, and delicate, and wishing good for all mankind." Such talk was none too welcome on Saturday night in the Permian Basin. No Artesia Water, no Perrier, just a couple of lottery tickets. As some of my companions were ahead of me in line, the girl behind the counter asked if we were all together.

"Who us?"

"Yeah, you two, you, and old 'delicate' over there. You all together?"

True to form, none of my companions would claim me. Seems like I had too many earrings. As far as I was

concerned, I was formally attired by Austin standards: sandals, nearly intact shirt, shorts. I mean, I was wearing something! I wouldn't really complain about this except that, where I'm from, unless one's nose is pierced, perhaps an eyebrow and chin, or other parts (too painful to mention), one doesn't really stand out. Of course, the geographical difference accounts for the somewhat provincial attitude I encountered. I hope that explains it all.

So. My new name is "Delicate," thanks to some girl behind the counter in Midland.

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Tenure: Fishing in England

Remember: it's deadline time for bulk mail Valentines. Notes from the road? It could work. Like "What I learned on my English Vacation, or Bubba does England."

ENGLAND--The British have never learned to make a decent cup of coffee, even their cappuccino is either too weak, or it just tastes like water with a little bit of mud thrown in it. Just to add body, you see. Just like the water from their great river Thames, which should by all rights, be pronounced in a much different fashion. Let's face it: the Brits can't do coffee or English right. But I did learn a thang or two bout them. I like Wales. It's cold, dreary, and grey all the time. Sun never comes out. Sky sort of drizzles, not like a good, Texas-Turd-Floating rain, more like that mist which comes out of the sprinklers at the outdoor fern bars.

Somewhere, Wales got good and sideways with the cosmic master-the odd gods made this really pretty country, and the people are friendly enough, but they all speak Gaelic. And the weather, on a good day, mind you, the weather is miserable at its very best. All this enchanting countryside and nothing but terrible weather. It was a dark and stormy night. But perhaps bit of true British surrealism came that one morning in Convent Garden, I mean, there I was with my little Welsh girlfriend, I told I like the people in Wales, and we were sitting in French Bistro, eating British Breakfast Food, and listening to Elvis on the stereo.

Then there's this appearance thing. I was wandering around King's Cross Station, looking for the Urania Trust, or desperately seeking astrology in London. Normal enough, one would suppose. Levi's, biker jacket, long hair, earrings, I mean, the traditional black garb is really

rather appropriate seeing as the how the sun comes up around eight or nine in the morning, and it sets long before tea time which occurs at 4 in the afternoon. In other words, it's black outside the whole time. So my black clothes fit right in. But it happens every time, there I was, rotating my London A to Z, trying to figure out where I was, where the astrology bookstore was, why the buildings had burglar bars on them, and up walk a couple of kids with backpacks. "Do you know where King's Cross Road is?" I look at them, fix my steady Scorpio-rising eyeball glare on 'em, and I drawl, "Like I have a clue? I'm lost'rn shit." Then, not two blocks further away, it happens again. Now, I implore you, when you're lost in a foreign country, don't ask strange looking Texans for advice. I took care of the last person who asked me by giving them a lengthy set of directions. I don't know if they found the tube stop they were looking for, but I don't have much patience with ugly American tourists. Be careful though, especially when I start to channel Elvis.

Maybe England's got the Queen, but the King is American.

Date: Mon, 30 Jan 1995 00:36:10 -0500

by Kramer Wetzel

Tenure: Gruene, Texas

GRUENE, TEXAS -- Maybe it's just one of those periodic things, a series of random events which conspire to make everything look like the guys with the conspiracy theories are right. Friday, it was a late lunch with a client, forcing everything off schedule and out of the nice, normal design. Saturday night, last night, in Gruene, it was the dinner.

The dinner wasn't the problem, although, a meal -- no matter how good -- that takes close to an hour to be delivered leaves something to be desired. Despite the staff's best efforts to entertain, the long July Fourth weekend just isn't the time to be in Gruene, at Texas' Oldest Dance Hall.

Unless, of course, Ray Wylie Hubbard is playing.

The winding and circuitous route was punctuated with questions about my virility and basic male-ness because I stopped and asked for directions. The funny thing was, the directions were wrong, so off we go on a long and leisurely drive, Texas at Sundown, meandering along a river choked with holiday folks while my companion is getting nervous about getting there.

"It's not like I haven't eaten all day or anything," she said.

Finally, after two more sets of directions from amused local people, we rolled into Gruene. Stand in line.

"But I know the band," she said.

Moments later, one band member's significant other (what do you call the bass player's girlfriend?) shows up

and tells the gate girl to let us in, that we're, "on the guest list."

Get in, say "hello" to the drummer, introductions, and "have you had dinner yet" noises. So off we go, just the two of us, me and the trusty sidekick, one more time, to get some diner.

Who would guess that Gruene would be vying for a world class restaurant these days? But what with the lovely and lazy view over the Guadalupe River, the hills of Comal County, the verdant tree tops, the idea of fine al fresco dining is almost too good to pass up.

Should've stuck to the burgers, out here in Texas.

To be sure, the Swordfish in the fine white sauce was delicious, and the shrimp something-or-other was good, too, but the poor servers were busy running up and down these stairs, and the kitchen took just a little too long to get the food out. Ambience only goes so far on an empty stomach.

But like the time before, the delay was fortuitous. We got back to Gruene Hall, just as the band was getting to the stage, arranging their instruments and starting to test their equipment over the house noise.

There are not many things in this world which are so quintessentially Texan as Ray Wylie Hubbard at Gruene Hall. Here's man who writes soulful lyrics, sets them to a deceptively simple country beat, and yet seems more like a Zen Master than anything else. If anyone in this world is going to channel Elvis, it's Ray Wylie Hubbard. And when the time demands it, like a July Fourth weekend, Ray can rock the house with a few good licks. So here's this country music trapped inside a Zen mind. And rocking the house with the best of the honky-tonk style he can set to that 4/4 beat.

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Bubba, it just don't get no better than this.

The crowd is everything from close-cropped Texas Aggies to the occasional long-haired grunge type. Halfway through the second set, Ray announces that they are going to play some "Garage Band Country and Western." Somehow this just fits.

The crowd: the guys with no hair to the guys with the long hair, and the women, from real women who look like Snuff Queens in the finest tradition of Saturday night honky-tonk cruising, to the occasional hippie chick in long, flowing dresses with long flowing tresses and everything in between. Big hair, big hats, real rednecks rubbing belt buckles with pretty young preppies.

Bubba, this is Texas, and there is nothing like a little Texas two-step, except watching some cowboy dressed in shorts, sandals and a huge cowboy hat, twirling a pretty young philly around.

Bubba, I ain't lying to you, try and find Loco Gringo's Lament by Ray Wylie Hubbard in a local store. You'll like it. Listen to the damn lyrics. Listen to the voice. Sure, I know it's country, but you'll like it. It's Texas music, about a half beat different and a half a beat better than anything else.

Date: Sun, 2 Jul 1995 11:01:06 -0400

Tenure: "Geology 303?"

Yes. Geology 303. Or 306, or maybe it was Chemistry, and I'm not talking about the kind of chemistry between two people, although, that's what this line leads to.

Yes. It's a line. I've seen my neighbor employ it three times in the last week. His girlfriend is out of town, doing an internship someplace else. So while me and him are out and about, for example, today at Amy's, he uses this line.

Bubba, enroll in school again, just for this reason. And take something like Geology 303. The funny thing is, the women just lap it up. I've seen, three times now. In just the last week. There was a waitress at Magnolia, a woman behind the counter at Amy's, and the girl behind the coffee counter at the bookstore. I mean, this line really, really works.

"You look familiar," he says.

(I know the script by heart now.)

"Yeah, you look familiar, too," she says.

"Geology 303. The lab?" he asks.

"I think so. What are you doing here...."

"Buying [books, coffee, breakfast, etc.]"

Look, Bubba, it is nothing more than an introduction, just a line to get a conversation going. But I've seen this gun-shy kid use it, again and again. I wouldn't have thought it was any big deal, but we had been out

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moving some furniture around, remind me to tell you the joys of owning a pickup truck at the end of the month, and we were all hot and sweaty, and of course, the kid didn't have a shirt on, and with an obviously pierced nipple, he looks pretty good. I guess. I mean, I don't think anyone should pierce anything more than their ears, but then, by these standards, I'm old fashioned. And that's a different tale to tell. Here we were, standing in Amy's Ice Cream, and there's this girl leaned over the cooler, digging out some scoops of Mexican Vanilla. She turns around, and it is love at first sight. Or something like that. I mean, one of those lovely little girls who works behind the counter at an Ice Cream store, as you can well imagine, a pert and healthy look without being too sun dried. Yes, it's definitely the healthy look. She takes one look at the three of us, we did employ another neighbor to aid in the moving of the furniture, and she does a double take on the pierce nipple.

Insert the line. Now, transpose this event into any one of a number of places, fairly typical in a college town. In fact, just about anyplace wherein you want to generate a random conversation with an appealing member of the opposite sex. I've seen it work. If a shy, introvert Virgo can get away with time and again, well, Bubba, you know it's just got to work for you and I.

Geology 303. Tell them I sent you.

Tenure: Death comes for . . .

I had to go to a funeral today. It wasn't the same as running up to Abilene for a fair.

Though I had argued with friends about the directions, the road was the same. My way is better -- go to Brady and hang a left (maybe it's a right) -- that's all. We tried the other route this morning. Being a passenger, I discovered that 183 is about 40 miles shorter than the 71. Which doesn't make sense. I mean, $183-71=112$, so it ought to be longer.

Leaving Austin, north on 183, past the construction and new strip centers, the countryside opens up into the beautiful rolling hills of Williamson County. It's not really open prairie. Beneath the leaden skies, it wasn't dry prairie. A lot of rain this fall awakened the green in the brush. Perhaps it is shades of green; the trees vary from the scrub oak, and live oak from the gnarled mesquite.

Exotic game ranches of emu and ostrich dot the way. I had on my Ostrich Skin Lucchese boots, so the trip fit, sort of. My favorite ranch has disappeared with the vicissitudes of the "Large Flightless Bird" industry, but I remember the sign well: 1-800-BIG-BIRD. The road winds into Lampasas (pop. 6283). It was breakfast time, time to slow down. After all, we were headed to a funeral.

We stopped at Martin's in Lampasas. It's an old-fashioned diner/restaurant with real formica tables and a pair of waitresses who are as hospitable as could be -- Ann is a gem. Bacon and eggs, and some of the best coffee ever. No downtown-double-expresso-mocha-java-banana-nut-double-decaf-latte stuff here. It's restaurant blend made with care by a professional coffee drinker for real folks. The local gossip sheet is put out by the town's

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radio station. The interesting news was who had been arrested yesterday, and for what. The usual suspects, a DWI. Ann said the first thing she does every day is read her horoscope. My friend entertained her with a few notes from Ann's palm. At one time I would pitch in with "card tricks:" whip out a deck of tarot cards for a simple reading. Quick and easy, not too heavy. Now I work from a birthday. Somehow I don't sound too different than the people in the paper.

We rolled northward, hurrying to Abilene and points north. An abandoned train station in Lometa is painted ocher. Maybe it's a hideous color, but the station could tell some stories: A town that grew and fell, riding on the economic waves that have dictated the fortunes and failures in the area.

Next was Burnet County (pronounced BURN-it.) In the relatively early hour of our passage, I noticed a man on the porch of a house, a rambling ranch style. The image seared my mind: What would it be like to stop the Information Highway's headlong rush into the future long enough to talk to real people? I don't know if I'll get a chance.

Our route took us briefly through the real San Saba County. Traveling this way, I carry a copy of J. Frank Dobie's *Coronado's Children*. A passage describes the lost mine that is "one day's ride" west of Georgetown. About where we were. The first chapter, "The Lost San Saba Mine," is dedicated to the various tales of lost treasure and Coronado's Lost Cities of Gold, which supposedly reside in this part of the country. More than one modern critic has suggested that J. Frank was prone to telling "stretchers" in the stories he reported as fact. So? During my fast highway run through here I make a silent pledge to return and find the lost mine.

Back on the road, the towns start to change: There's Comanche, Zephyr, the Avalon motel in Brownwood ... Who comes up with these names? Then it's into the outer edges of the oil patch. The first oil wells are here -- old pumps not pumping. It's sad, what with the price of oil these days, although you couldn't tell that from the posted gasoline prices. It doesn't pay to keep the old pumps working.

My traveling partner corrected me on the route: "If you go 183 instead of 71, you don't have to go through Eden." A good point. Eden is in the middle of nowhere, possibly named for a spring and a single grouping of trees. We missed it. On through the last gap in the hills, like a cut between mountains, then a straight shot into the flatland and real prairie which stretches the rest of the way. Abilene is the edge of the hills, as far as I can tell. Here you'll find oil and gas collection points mixed with the mesquite. Towns have names like Oplin and Novice, and Lawn, which has a real Hiway Grocery. Expressions like, "I been to a big city; shoot, Abilene has a mall" are common.

After a break for iced tea in Abilene, it was back on the road, all the way to Haskell. Past the refinery and irrigation supply north of Abilene, it's easy to understand why this is called Big Country. It's not big, it's huge. Maybe I've been in the concrete arroyos too long. Too many skyscraper canyons. In what feels like the middle of nowhere, there's that famous icon from the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church -- the famous neon of: Jesus Saves. One day it will be a cultural icon. In these here parts, each township or hamlet has a minimum of three churches: First Baptist, United Methodist and Church of Christ. Bare minimum. Not many other faiths are practiced out here.

We made this made dash through the Texas countryside on an almost-perfect September afternoon to attend a

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funeral. The deceased was a not a close friend, but the rest of the family is. A show of support was important enough to spend half a day driving to spend an hour in a church and a few minutes at graveside. I've put on the "marrying and burying" suit too many times this year. Dressed up again, I look out of place with the longest hair of just about anyone there, save for one or two girls. None of the men had enough hair to make a small ponytail. This is rural Texas, in a small town where businesses were closed for the afternoon so everyone could attend the funeral. The house was filled with four generations of family -- great grandmother, grandmother, wife and daughter. Inside the Presbyterian church (a slight change from normal) my companion and I got some looks. The family greeted me warmly. The eldest grandmother was particularly glad to see me. With a haircut I could be her child.

Sometimes, I'm too sick for myself. A thought crept into my travel-addled brain. It was a line from Jeff Foxworthy, You Know You're Redneck If.... "If you've ever asked the widow for her phone number at the funeral parlor." I kept it to myself.

Looking around, I understood why a comedian once said that he would rather be "Red than Dead." Real people were here. Cowboy hats. Boots. Western-cut suits with big yokes. Nothing copied from Country Music TV or a fashion statement. It's a way of life. This funeral and the proceeding, with country and western music in the sanctuary and a corpse laid out with his favorite cowboy hat in his hand, was real.

I went tripping back to a time in 1974, wearing a straw cowboy hat and listening to live country music when outlaws were outlaws. The deceased's son is a member of the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets. A real Aggie. If you are outside of Texas, you wouldn't understand. If you're in Texas, you've heard the jokes. I attended a similar

institution where uniforms and pride and male bonding were formed through tough physical exertion, and hazing was the fashion. I saw a cadre of cadets standing by their comrade offering the most touching display of empathy I have ever seen. Impeccable. Exemplary. I didn't cry at the funeral. I didn't cry at the grave. The people began filing past the family members. The guys in their sharp brown uniforms, various ranks, shook the ladies' hands and hugged their brother. Each hug was tight and emotional. Heartfelt. Maybe I'm too cynical, but it got to me.

We left as soon as we could. Back down the road, back to reality, back to computers and clients and the phone. Back to the cellular madness of home. We were just north of Santa Anna -- watching gray clouds scudding over a fire-orange sky -- and I was trying to put words on it all. Sometimes speech fails. T.S. Eliot would work here. I glanced in the rearview, worried about a dark spectre following me.

OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR.

Date: Wed, 20 Sep 1995 02:26:33 -0500

by Kramer Wetzel

Tenure: Alaska & Mercury

I have finally seen something bigger than Texas.

Tickets, agreements, contracts, and strange connection between the Alaska wilderness and Texas.

The Alaska trip got started when I got some email from a person living in Alaska and wondering what it would take to get me up there. To carry the conversation further, this particular person was, indeed, a former Austin resident with deep ties into our Texas cultural heritage. Her grand daddy was the famous cowboy boot maker, Charlie Dunn. And if that reference doesn't mean anything, try listening to Jerry Jeff Walker sometime; he has a ballad about Charlie.

By the time I got to the Anchorage airport, I saw a lot more cargo planes than people planes. Seemed like cargo outnumbered people two to one. The flight from Anchorage (which is 15 minutes South of Alaska, according to the denizens) offered beautiful and really breathtaking scenery. The clear day had an awesome view of Mt. McKinley with the plane was jet passing the 20,000 foot mark, according to the pilot, and we were about even with the summit.

I might add, however, the mountain is flanked by at least two glaciers. (Bubba, a glacier is a river that never thaws--solid ice, remember that college earth science lab?) As a kid, I dreamed about climbing those mountains, these days, I'm real happy just to be flying over them.

My first evening in Fairbanks, I encountered some strange sights. It was like a scene from some sort of surreal theater, perhaps something dreamed up by a post modern playwright, possibly from the Russian

schools, a snowplow with a dirt bike: there was a pickup truck with a snowplow on the front and a dirt bike in the bed.

Impressions of Fairbanks? That's easy. It reminded me, on that first arrival of New Mexico. Not the present NM, but the way it was 25 years ago. And that frontier/pioneer "us against the odds" spirit is very prevalent, even in so-called "modern Alaska".

I was at a radio station the first morning, two in fact, for radio spots and interviews. The station is right in the middle of town, in as much as there is any kind of center to town. One of the jocks was wearing a T-shirt and shorts. Seems it was spring time to him. Glen was rejoicing in the warm weather. Dirty snow drifts were outside, the roofs were still covered with snow, and some trucks still had snow plows attached to the front bumpers -- maybe it's me, I just didn't feel like shorts were in order yet. Of course, that just might just be my take on the situation. Glen was the first person wearing shorts that day. He wasn't the last. And if your ever in Fairbanks, listen to Glen in the morning. I know sport a WOLF radio bumper sticker on my PowerBook. But to really fit in, I guess I need a "protected by Smith and Wesson" sticker, too.

One evening, I got a rare treat: the Northern Lights. I got an email from my Dad a few days prior, alerting me to the fact that there had been a solar flare which would translate into spectacular Northern Lights. Pa Wetzel was right again! On the way back from the club that night, late at night, we stopped the truck because the lights were so fantastic.

One of my hosts related a short tale about a near car wreck the first time she had been exposed to the sight. "Almost ran off the road," she was relating, as she pulled the truck over to the side of the narrow road.

by Kramer Wetzel

There was dirty old snow piled high on the edge roadway, a gentle but frigid breeze stirring the tops of the trees, and giant arc of light stretching from one side to the other.

"Wow, a full arc, that's rare," my host pointed out.

I've heard the Northern Lights crackle once, but that was a long time ago. And having never been this far north, I've never been exposed to the Lights this close. They took up almost half the sky at one point. Like a full rainbow, only, this one metamorphosed into curtain-like shapes and long streamers which stretched halfway around the sky.

If I were into reading folk omens and home-spun portents, instead of astrology, there would be something highly significant about the Northern Lights that I saw because over in the west, about even with the Gemini Moon, there was that smudge of a stellar fingerprint in the sky, the Hale-Bopp Comet. The moon, the Northern Lights, and the comet appearing within the western edge of the giant arc of light, must be portentous of something, something good is coming.

We took a day off from a busy schedule to go up the "haul road" towards the Arctic Circle.

"Next services 118 miles" is what the sign said. Birch, fir, aspen, and winters's russet colors made up the foliage along the highway.

It's certainly the furthest north I've ever been. The Arctic Circle is a band at the top of our planet. Everything North of it is cold.

I began to worry at some of the signs we came to: "Pavement Ends" (always reassuring).

"Just how far are going?" was my question. I've got to quite taking these trips on blind faith.

"Yukon River 112 Miles" read one sign. "Welcome to Joy Alaska" seemed like the next one. I've been in some small towns before, but "Joy" with its single building might qualify as the smallest town I've ever been through.

At this point, I had been riding in the truck for a while, looking at the map for a while, and this dirt track we were on is marked as a state highway. In case I was wondering about it, the next sign confirmed my fears: "speed limit 50 next 416 miles"

We stopped for some lunch at Yukon Crossing which is 125 miles NORTH of Fairbanks. And we still weren't all the way to our destination. One of the more bizarre signs we encountered was "road closes for aircraft" which meant there was small landing strip incorporated into this section of the highway. There's a gate, just like a railroad crossing gate, and that's how drivers know when to yield to aircraft....

Perhaps one of the strangest occurrences was what the cook at Yukon Crossing was reading, *Tacticus*. The discussion with the cook centered on what translators were best for Greek history. In the middle of the Arctic country which, for all its beauty, is still plenty bleak. Check out those classic scholars.

Back down in Fairbanks, just up on the hillside, sort of north of town, there's (locally) famous truck stop diner kind of place called, aptly enough, "Hilltop". One of the finer members of the local counter culture establishment offered to escort me there.

by Kramer Wetzel

You know you're going into a good place when the sign outside reads: Caution - falling snow and ice.

"What kind of ice cream you got?"

"White."

"Vanilla?" I asked.

"White."

While I was working in the hotel in Fairbanks, doing my readings, really reminded me of a motel in San Angelo. No, it wasn't so much the physical description of the place, but rather a feeling I had. There was series of motels in the early 1950's which were all constructed with a an atrium of sorts, and these hotels dot the West Texas landscape. There's one in Lubbock, one in Midland, and one in San Angelo. The one in San Angelo has been a Howard Johnson, an independent, and some other brand name that I can't remember. The one in Midland is a Holiday Inn, surely one of the flagships of the hotel trade in West Texas. They all have this little area which offers miniature golf.

It's the one in San Angelo that I kept getting an image of, along the banks of the Concho River. I haven't been there in over a year now, so I can't say for sure what it's like now, but I kept getting a visual, emotional echo of the place whenever I wandered around the halls the hotel in Fairbanks. Something oddly familiar there. I kept expecting Robert Service to pop out any minute.

During dinner one night with Robert and friends, I found out that the population of Alaska is roughly a half million.

In other words, the state has half the number of people that Austin has, give or take a few hundred.

"Does that number include bears?" I asked.

My final scene from me in Alaska was in the parking lot of the bar, just across the highway from the airport. When I went into the place, the sign across the street said, "Time, 9:50 PM, Temperature, 22 degrees." After dinner, we were all standing around, giving our respective good byes, and I looked at Robert, wearing only khaki pants and a t-shirt, telling me casually what a warm night it was. I was freezing. I had on long underwear, a t-shirt, sweater, flannel shirt, vest, heavy coat, wool socks and boots. The parking lot was frozen mud. Snow was still heaped four feet high around the edge of the parking area. I was shivering. The sign said, "Time, 10:58 PM, temperature, 18 degrees."

Through my chattering teeth, I was begging them to get in the truck and turn on the heater. Robert was merely holding forth about how "spring-like" the weather was. Sure. Sure thing. Just get that heater cranked up NOW.

Kramer Wetzell
Astrology Home Buoy
Totus mundus agit histrionem
April, 1997

by Kramer Wetzel

Tenure: ADVENTURES IN AUSTIN

Subject: FISHing for Pisces in Austin

AUSTIN, TEXAS: It was late. The Austin fair was just getting cranked up, and wham! I had one of those nightmare sequences. I had just returned from the bathroom, just like in "Pulp Fiction," and I was adding fliers to the outside table. You know, the advertising. I turned around and a couple of ladies are approaching the table. Tall, stately, elegant, a bit roguish -- Sunday morning in South Austin anything goes. One of the women looks at me and says, "Hello Kramer."

"Hi. Here, have one of these."

I smiled, turned and returned to my table, scared to death. She knows me, but from where? A few minutes later, after circling around the fair, she stopped to talk. I remembered: I had chatted with her a month before. No need to worry about this being someone I knew from a previous life in this lifetime. It wasn't someone back to haunt me. It wasn't!

That one scared me, Bubba. I was worried, if only for a few minutes. But wait. It gets worse. I got stuck with the final lecture slot on Sunday afternoon, a slot that does not allow for a large attendance. I figured out what the deal was: The woman who coordinated the lectures is a Pisces. Yesterday she'd complained about my forecasts for Pisces in my monthly newsletter, saying they were getting shorter and shorter. She felt like I was doing her an injustice. OK, she is editing the local newsletter. I will pay more attention to Pisces. But look: It's not my fault that the whole sign is suffering from an onslaught of reality brought on by our friend Saturn. Besides, between you and me, Bubba, reality is overrated.

Since her monthly astrological forecast was getting shorter, she saw to it that I got shortest lecture draw. Remember the classes in college right after lunch? The sleepers? Same thing. All because Saturn is in Pisces. That's the trouble with being an astrologer: I get blamed for what the planets do.

But that's not what I was going to explain. My Gemini dinner date gathered me up after the fair, and we traipsed off for South Austin food. After awhile, it became abundantly clear she wanted to go grocery shopping. This is the same person who told me about a real Texas night, late-summer style: carrot juice, vodka and chocolate chip cookies. Go figure. I guess you had to be there.

Tonight evolved into one of those things. She wanted a few groceries -- washers and garlic -- but the trip turned into a pleasant time at Amy's. The Amy's Ice Cream on Guadalupe is nowhere near the grocery store. But after a day of doing readings it became near the grocery store. Besides, I was letting the Gemini drive and who knows what they will come up with.*

The store was packed. A line snaked its way out into the parking lot. Sunday night, after ten. Where do these people come from? There were the usual suspects and then there were the patrons. I've told you before, and I'll tell you again: I want to work at Amy's -- it looks like too much fun. As soon as we walked in, a girl behind the counter started a contest for free ice cream. "Eat four sugar cones in a minute, and you get a free ice cream. Who wants to try it?"

She attempted to goad me into the gambit, but it didn't work. I had already eaten as much as I could and I was merely humoring my friend. In stagger in a couple of your typical student-ghetto types: long hair, earrings,

by Kramer Wetzel

faded t-shirts, nondescript shorts, baseball hats on backwards, glassy eyes, the usual. The last of this motley crew was conned into making a fool of himself. To be fair, he wasn't that foolish, and he most likely felt like a victim of circumstance. Here's this cute girl saying, "You can do it! Come on! Free ice cream!" and the rest of us in line chanting his name.

No, he didn't make it. But it was close. He was having trouble chewing the last bit when the store counted down the last ten seconds. I'll bet he got free ice cream anyway. That's the way it is at Amy's. When it was finally our turn to order, with The Beatles blaring on the hi-fi, the kids behind the counter were singing and dancing. That part didn't really bother me, but I couldn't help but notice that no one behind that counter had even been born when the White Album came out. Yet they knew some of the more obscure lyrics, word for word.

I mentioned this fact and the rabble rouser of the crowd asks me, "How would you know?" Think, Bubba, when was the White Album released? To cap it off, I had been dealing with birthdays all day. I was in work mode.

The ice cream was a blessing, I had Butterfingers and bananas mixed in mine. The Gemini friend dropped me off at home, and here we are.

Oh yeah, the scary girl. I couldn't find one of my FGS cards so I gave her one of yours. If you get a date out of the deal, please name the first child after me. Or an ice cream store, if it's a female. Me? I'm drinking herb tea and calling it a weekend.

* Gemini is always plural. Believe me. It's an astrology thing.

Date: Mon, 11 Sep 1995 01:31:36 -0400

Tenure: Hank III

"Well, I used to think that country
was out of Nashville Tennessee
I'd rather take my things and
Go back to Texasee"

[Trashville or Texasee, depends on the author's mood,
Hank Williams III, BMI/Mike Curb Music, 2002]

It started a few years ago on a lonely afternoon in Austin. We'd all gone down to the Broken Spoke to get some chicken fried steak. I figured it was a trick of some of the neon in the place--the waitress's hair looked purple. Or pink. She was traditionally attired in a western yoke shirt, jeans, and boots, but her hair, as it turned out, was died a mawkish punk color. The bumper sticker reads "Keep Austin Weird" and she was just doing her part.

That worked. We got to talking about music, and the next thing I know, I'm prowling around music stores, looking for a "Hank Williams the Third" CD, solely based on her recommendation. Finally found it in the Country section of Cheapo disks, an independent store. Next thing you know, I'm trying to convince all my friends that this is the greatest musical revelation to come along in the millennium. The vocal style was that of Hank Williams Senior. The songs themselves had a little bit of an edge. "Edge" is hard to define, but there's a raw quality, like the pain and woe is real, rather than manufactured.

Soon thereafter, I had a chance to see Hank III for the first time. Amazing show. He was just getting out of rehab, and he appeared a little high-strung. He did his cover of Johnny Cash's "Cocaine Blues," from that first record. But live, it's slightly different. Imagine a speed metal band playing acoustic instruments. Stand up bass,

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demon fiddle, pedal steel guitar, drummer banging out a high-strung backbeat, Hank 3 himself on an acoustic six-string, wearing a near-to-death straw cowboy hat. He sidles up to the microphone and sounds, for all the world, just like the scratchy tunes vocals on antique recording equipment, lines laid down by his grandfather.

Shelton Hank Williams, nominally called "Hank Three," is an outlaw. Or, he's a "neo-classicist" country singer. Putting together some kind of a biographical sketch is a little difficult because there's the onerous weight of his namesake, his familial lineage, and the fact that he's basically a punk. A "cow punk," or, in his terms, "Hellbilly." Some facts are also clearly shrouded in myth and lore, or, one would have to wonder, maybe publicity hype. Allegedly, Hank 3 started peddling his career as "Hank Williams the Third" in response to a paternity suite.

The first time I saw him live, it was an amazing revelation. I'd like to claim I was the oldest person in the audience, and on a median average, I might have been, but there were certainly a number of people older than myself. Folks have heard, through the ubiquitous country music underground, that Hank 3 is almost a mirror image of his grandfather. Might be the case. The vocal work, both on that first album and that first set live, makes one believe in both reincarnation and genetics.

Under the correct circumstances, though, Hank 3 gets to play a second set. When I heard that second set, I could only think of one kind of taxonomy for his other brand of music: punk. Checking some of the web sites, I found at least one allusion to speed metal, which, in all honesty, might fit--considering how much I don't know about the sub-genres of metal. Then again, it might not. Punk music born out of the 1980's sounded a lot like some of that stuff Hank 3 plays in his second set. At one time, he

referred to it as "Screaming Devil Rock." I believe he was about half-serious.

I came for the country music that first time, stayed for the loud stuff, and found that the loud stuff was every bit as good, if not better, than the rather formidable country music. Heavy metal, death metal, speed metal, or my own appellation of punk, doesn't much matter what you call it. It's loud, it's angry, it's energetic, it uses certain repetitive phrases one would expect--lots of F words--and yet, there's something underlying it all. Some mystical, lyrical thread forms a basic backbone. That speed-death-heavy-punk-metal thing, there's a sense that it was put together by musicians. Skilled musicians, not honing their chops but actually quite accomplished in their skill sets. Maybe even having some fun.

In one of his band's previous incarnations, a member of Slayer worked with Hank 3. The last time I saw them in Austin, "Slayer" had played the night before, and that music was much on the audience's mind. In the middle of the country set, Hank 3 got up close and personal with the microphone, and in his death-metal screaming voice, he playfully suggested, "Play some SLAYER!" Maybe it wasn't really a playful voice, but the attitude was that of someone having some fun.

I could only make fragments of some of the metal lyrics, but most of the tunes had a country, down-home sense to them, although the music itself was angry. Some critics, those of us getting older, would claim that's it's not really music, just noise. It's more than that. As near as I've been able to determine, having seen him live a number of times now, there's at least one song that doubles as both a country song and punk song. Same lyrics, slightly different musical emphasis. I've been unable to corroborate this fact about the lyrics, but it's

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not beyond Hank 3's formidable reach and talent as a musician.

Not so long ago, on a cold winter night in northeast Texas, I had a chance to see H3 at a club. A Country and Western Club. We got there a little early, paid the cover charge, and looked around the dance floor, the neon, the usual accoutrements of a stereotype cowboy bar in suburbia, and me with my unkempt long curls, I wondered if I'd wandered into a some place I ought not be. Standing around, I got my date a beer, and as show time got closer, the club's crowd shifted. First it was the rockabilly types, one or two guys with tattoos crawling out from under dark t-shirts, the denim jeans with the 4-inch cuffs, the "Ford Dealership" jackets, and chain-drive wallets. Then the punks started to show up, more tattoos, more piercings, even more clothing that was "distressed" and not distressed in a store-bought way.

On top of the neo-punk, post-post-modernist look, there was an assortment of cowboy hats in various states of disrepair. The crowd looked like a group of people that didn't belong together. At all. Period. Slicked-up city-cowboys from northeast Texas, punk rock girls, rockabilly boys, and the odd preppy looking kid. "Man, when I saw Hank 3 was playing, I just had to see him!" said one guy, standing in line behind us.

Hank 3 started with the opening from his first album, and it was gratifying to see most of the crowd singing along, or at least mouthing, the lyrics. These are some very dedicated fans. I remember hearing, early in that set, "7 months 39 days..." That song was released on the second official Hank Williams III album, "Lovesick, Broke & Driftin'."

The first time I noticed any unease with the regulars in that kicker bar was when Hank 3 swung into one of his two songs about the state of country music and his

apparent dislike of the current state of affairs along Nashville's fabled Music Row. He openly sings about his distaste for the way music business is being run. In an aside to the crowd, Hank 3 pointed out that classic rock stations played the classics, whereas most pop-country, hot-country branded stations avoid playing anything from the established masters.

One would have to assume this means members of his own family, as well. Listen to some of the so-called popular country stations, and this might very well be true. While this was universally acknowledged as fact by the die-hard Hank 3 crowd, the regulars at that place seemed a little uneasy that someone, especially some kid, was treating them in an unkind fashion. For the briefest moment, there was a feeling like seeing a bull being hit by a 50,000 volt cattle prod, right before the rider signals to open the gate. The creature's back ripples a little--I kept waiting on the gate to open.

That one winter night, after an hour and a half of country, Hank 3 announced, "The bar owner said we could do three songs, no more, of our other stuff. Just stand still while we do this, okay?" Brawny bouncers in black cowboy hats had one or two altercations that looked like excessively exuberant rockers were getting too excited, but there were no fights. I don't recall anyone getting forcibly ejected, either.

The hat comes off, the yoke shirt is tossed aside, and in a three-minute break, Hank 3 becomes a rocker. His locks are long and straight, shaved close on the sides, and with that hair pulled back and laced up in a thong, he looks almost as straight as can be. Other times, he's gone so far as to wear pig-tails, a braid, or just let it flow long, especially for that second set.

The last time I saw Hank 3 in Austin, I couldn't help but think to myself, "I'm too old to be in a club where a few

by Kramer Wetzel

of the patrons have genuine Mohawks." Put aside the attire and the diversity of the crowd, though. Listen to the music itself. It carves out a niche some place between classical country and hardcore honky-tonk. Plus there's his "Screaming Devil Rock," and the only question I haven't found answered yet, is where is the album called, "This Ain't Country"? Its existence is a well-documented rumor.

If you get a chance to see him live, go for the country, then, if you're at least slightly open-minded, stay for the hardcore set. In one, you'll hear soulful country, done straight from an outlaw's pure heart. In the next, you'll hear some damn fine rock and roll, or heavy metal, or Dixiecore, or whatever it's called, but listen to it. The range, the versatility, the raw talent itself is what counts. How often do you get two full shows for the price of one?

Hank 3's band is pretty strange, even by my jaded, "I've seen it all" standards. Imagine heavy metal, or death metal, or screaming devil rock, or even circa 1982 punk played by a band that consists of a pedal steel guitar, a standup bass, a fiddle, and Hank 3 on electric guitar. "Give me some more volume man," he says as he switches, "turn it up."

[original text, 2002]

Tenure: Travel notes, part whatever

It gets weirder every minute of the day. The security guard in Austin looked at my T-shirt, Cafe Excalibur — Red Light District — Amsterdam, "That a good place?" Sure. "What is it? Seafood?" No, long pause, coffee? "It's in Houston?"

Then, despite having a connecting flight through SeaTac, on a sunny day in Seattle, I still had to go out and back in the security thing. The guard — a mere pup — took a look at my laptop, "Hey, he's got one of those *hippie* Macintosh computers...." And grinned at me.

Then, I stopped and asked two uniformed officials, one was a cop, one was a sheriff, neither were third-party security, where a particular gate was, you know, the kind used by the small airplanes.

They directed me to the gate, but then laughed, "Is your insurance paid up? Those small planes, you know...."

They were just funning. Everyone in SeaTac was so nice. Almost put the Houston people to shame. Almost. I never did figure out why one traveler was connecting from Boston to Houston to SeaTac, but then, I don't run airlines. Just seems like it's the long way around.

That last update was from the departure lounge at the airport. I'm pleased with the throughput on their wireless network. At least, it's a lot easier too get the airport on time, and bringing my own sweet roll is a lot cheaper than buying airport food at airport prices. Bubba called me while I was waiting at the airport, and I assured him I'd love to lunch, but he'd have to buy a ticket to get in the door where I was. But I assured him that I had nothing but his best interests deep in my heart, to which he responded, "You can try that line on chicks, but I'm not that dumb." Had me laughing into

by Kramer Wetzel

the phone at the airport. Might've been the sweet roll,
too. All that sugar, making me giddy.

Tenure: Austin ground notes

It's been one of those mornings already. I had to run to the bank, sort of an unexpected [and gratefully received] deposit to make. And as long as I was at the bank, I jogged up to Jo's for coffee. I couldn't believe that people ventured forth from their domiciles at such an early hour [9:00 AM].

At Jo's, I snagged some coffee and a fresh cinnamon roll, rolled home, and tossed the roll into the carry-on. Perfect airport food. If I ever find that "airline food" website again, I've got pictures for them. I just had to have one last dose of Austin before taking off for weekend with family. Coming back from Jo's, I ran into a guy who was out walking his bird. Guy had a parrot [probably a macaw, really], and he'd gone for a cup of coffee, and the bird had gone, too. Pretty thing, almost two feet tall, orange and bright blue feathers. The bird. This is normal.

Then while I was avoiding work, I found an item on an ex-girlfriend's boyfriend's sister-law's blog, talking about their kids, "She took her first step today towards being a teenager, she got a cell phone...." Might've been a cousin of a former lover who's engaged to this guy, and his sister has a brother-in-law, and that's where I found the quote. I couldn't duplicate the link a second time, I have no idea where that was.

Cars, man, that used to tell the men from the boys. Cars. Some kind of a car. Wheels. These days, and I guess it comes earlier, it's that "first cell phone, baby." Or, that first cell phone for my baby boy/girl? I still remember one Gemini I was chatting up, and she said, "I couldn't believe it, my niece is almost ten, and no one's taught her how to shoot yet!" Yes, firearm safety is important.

by Kramer Wetzel

I didn't set out to make it a long afternoon wandering around town. I had a scare at the post office as I was sending a pocketknife via Priority Mail [insured]. Look: I've received lots of these items via Priority Mail — for years. Best service, no lie. The USPS Priority *rocks* for eBay orders. But the clerk, I did business with him the day before, asked what it was, breakable? "No, it's just pocketknife, smaller than this credit card." He paused, was going to have to check it out, then looked at the line, and I assured him that I've done this many times, both sending and receiving, and it was perfectly legal. I don't do anything illegal. *Ever*. Except jaywalk, but I have to do something to still feel like rebel.

Meandering along took me into the former Ruta Maya coffee house, now called something else. There was an intriguing menu item, but when I inquired, it wasn't quite what I thought it was, Green Tea Latte. I was hoping it was really a frothed, espresso-style preparation. Nope, just some mix. Never mind, make mine a regular cappuccino. I want nearly boiling water pressured through good ground beans, milk that's been fluffed up with steam, something with some body, and smooth, too.

I was going to go straight home, but I got call about some service and support, and I needed to hit the bank, and that turned me towards South Congress. Been a while since I'd meandered further south than Jo's, so I stopped, got another coffee [served by a Taurus], then stopped at Guero's while I answered another call on the cell phone, trying to fix a computer. I shrugged into my shirt because I was availing myself of their patio. I could hear it in the background, though, "It's Kramer, I'll bet he's got a drink in one hand and his shirt in the other, walking around downtown half naked." It's well over 90 degrees, you bet I have my shirt off. Anything more than a loincloth is probably overkill. Exactly how

practical is suit and tie in this weather? Or maybe that's just me.

Magnolia isn't much further along, so I made a special trip, had the lunch special, which was my breakfast, or dinner, late in the afternoon. Called it a day.

Airports and points way far north on Friday.

(Originally posted August 30, 2002)

by Kramer Wetzel

Tenure: I am not a painter.

Piet Mondrian [Dutch, 1872-1944]

The Mondrian Exhibit, now at the Kimbell Art Museum in Ft. Worth, is well worth the admission. Funny, I used to chase a girl in Ft. Worth and never made it to the museum, but then, she left town, and I'm there a lot. And I finally got to see the museum, too. And I'm not even sure what that proves, but I'm sure it proves something about women and Ft. Worth.

The Kimbell's exhibit is called "Mondrian 1892-1914: the Path to Abstraction." Before we go *any* further, let's get a few points cleared up. I know fuck-all about art, modern art, postmodern art, impressionist, perspective, realists, linear, non-linear, whatever they teach them kids over in the Art History Department. Got that? Hate to be crude and vulgar, but I couldn't come up with a better way to express my intimate lack of knowledge about this topic. I couldn't tell an abstraction from a modern from a cubist or a cubicle. Zilch. Zero. Nada. Dada.

I am not a painter. Nor, for that matter am I a studied critic in these circles. I've been to the Louvre, I kind of dig the National Gallery in London, and the last time I was at the new Tate Gallery, I had one of those "art" experiences that shook me up a little. There was a Jackson Pollock painting, about 15 feet long, maybe 20 or 25 feet long, and for the first time — ever — I could understand why — and how — his "dribble" paintings made sense. There was a flow, action, some sense of feeling involved with that one painting. It got up and rocked and rolled right along. No, I didn't "get it," but I did get something, a sense of activity, like a timeline, or like the painting had a plot, sort of. After looking at the painting, I had a sense that my world-view had been

enlarged, changed, and I was different for the experience, emotionally richer.

So I saw the sign for the Mondrian Exhibit, and I went back for it. Well worth the trip. After covering something like 600 miles of Texas in an afternoon, going back just to see some stuff on the walls of dusty museum was no big deal.

The title said, "The Path to Abstraction," and that's what it's about. It starts with his earlier paintings. Some of them are fairly realistic impressions of scenes from the Netherlands. Same trip I saw the new Tate, I also saw Amsterdam for the first time. Pretty cool. We included the art museum there — I think it was Van Gogh. Maybe Picasso. It was one of those guys. Anyway, whichever painter it was, he was a running buddy of Piet Mondrian, and had some influence over the guys life. With the show in Ft. Worth, I was able to see, step-by-step, how the abstraction idea came to work.

First, there's a series of landscapes and other similar images from Amsterdam and the surrounding countryside, windmills, water, farms, water, trees, water, and so forth. Lots of water, and even in his earlier works, Mondrian had a way of making water appear wet, almost fluid, right there on the painting. Get up close, and scrutinize the painting, and you can tell it's just oil paint or crayon or charcoal, but step back, and it looks like the water is moving. I remember one charcoal sketch, out of series of three images of the same farm, done at different times, and even with the limits of burnt charcoal, the water appeared to move. [Around here, charcoal is used as an art form in a completely different way - BBQ.] Throughout the display of the earlier works, often there would be series of different mediums used on nearly identical images. Same setting, different stuff. Almost as if he - as the artist - was trying to refine the image to get to its essence.

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The later stuff started with a tree. I got that postcard and sent it to Sagittarius buddy, matter of fact. The tree itself was clearly visible, but the background was a wash of colors, creating the beginning of his steps into abstraction - be my guess.

Influences from Picasso - I think - and cubists were evident [later in the exhibit](http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_works_112_0.html). One painting particularly caught my eye, sort of [grey-purple thing with lots of black lines](http://www.kimbellart.org/database/index.cfm?detail=yes&ID=APg%201983.03) and patchwork colors, and all I could think of was his earlier work with trees. What it looked like to me. The little fine print that went with that one painting was what really got me thinking, see, they art history aficionados had x-rayed the painting, and Mondrian had worked on that canvas for a while, there was a picture underneath it. Obviously, that he'd been doing was trying to get at the very essence of whatever it was he was painting.

By the end of his career, and yes, Ft. Worth owns one of those masterpieces, it's nothing more than a white canvas with black lines, a couple of red squares, and - I think - two yellow squares. There's a similar one of his, I've seen it either at one of the museums of modern art [NY, SF, London, Dallas] or just in picture, but to me, it's a cityscape. Like my "art" experience with the Jackson Pollock, this one image has stayed with me for most of my life.

The [picture, that image, the painting, the artwork](http://www.moma.org/docs/collection/paintsculpt/c70.htm), captures the feeling of a cityscape in a few lines. The movement, the

bustle, the action of an inhabited place. Movement. In a few short squares of color.

I can't even begin to paint like that. I am not a painter.

Originally posted: August 28, 2002

by Kramer Wetzel

Year in review — part two

(the professional points...)

Many, many years ago, I was working alongside a professional psychic, a guy who I trust implicitly. He's since retired and pursues other goals, although, as gifted as he is, I doubt he's given up — he just doesn't work the same circuit anymore.

Middle of the afternoon, we were standing at the urinals, doing what guys do there, and he asked about a particular planet's transit.

"Man, I always feel it when those big planets shift signs," he was saying, "wow. Those are Ant Eater, huh?" From planets in transit to boots.

So Uranus slipped into Pisces. Pisces is associated with Neptune, and Aquarius is associated with Uranus. Mutual reception

Unrelated sidebar note:

In older astrology, Aquarius shares Saturn with Capricorn and Pisces shares Jupiter with Sagittarius.

When I was in California, Oakland, to be precise, I got Sister to haul me up to Berkley for an astrology reading by another author. Because our work, in my mind, is so similar, I just figured it was the thing to do.

I've been through my own chart so many times, I didn't figure that there was much to talk about that I haven't seen before. Approaching a reading with zero expectations is good. Besides, I've been through all the tough transits, and I didn't figure that there was anything new he could throw at me. However, he's one of the few astrology authors I truly have a deep and

abiding respect for, and his approach seems very similar to my own.

He asked what my expectations were, and I said I had none — I'd already learned a great deal from just going through the process of booking a reading, that "Should I spend the money on talking to an astrologer about what the future trends might be" thing. Cold feet, trying to arrange a good time to meet, where to meet, all the material I have to go through to arrange for a reading — from the consumer side.

Deal is, he charges just about the same as I do, and like me, he doesn't do too many readings in person — most of the work is phone work.

It was amazing. Remember, my expectations were zero. I'm sorry, perhaps it's my own arrogance, but I'm pretty sure that there's not a lot left that's going to be new to me.

As far as I was concerned just going through the process was worth the price of admission, before I ever got the reading.

The reading itself was nothing big, but I was in top form for listening. Which is what I did. Ahead of time, I'd reread some of his books, then followed up with other books he recommends. Same books I recommend.

It's taken me a while to get around to digesting the whole experience.

Part of the message came back the other evening, when Uranus headed into Pisces.

No, I don't have any "tall, dark handsome stranger" entering my life to sweep me away. No stranger from a foreign land to make my life complete. No promise of a

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big lottery win. Questions about direction, affirmations of what I know and do, possible points to ponder for the future.

Last image I remember was him, with a wan smile, sitting on the stoop in front of his home, sorting through his junk mail. Just like anyone else.

Originally posted January 1, 2004

High Holy Days

Pause for a moment.
The King's birthday.

"Thank you. Thank you very much."

Originally posted January 8, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Intuition & repeats:

I've got a half-beaten manuscript sitting on the coffee table. It's a cookbook, an astrology cookbook. That's what this type of manual is referred to in the trade.

"My sun is in Capricorn, damn, this book says I'm doomed."

That's why it's called a cookbook, you leaf through the text and look up your own definitions. Of course, mine's a little different. Hit any big bookstore, and there's a usually a whole shelf full of astrology cookbooks. Kind of hard to come up with something new. I managed to put a new spin on relationships with the first book, but that one took years.

Over lunch at Romeo's, and a Leo reading, we got to talking about books and the printing process. And the writing process. Which reminded me why I was having such a hard time finishing that cookbook.

Since the first of the year, I've done over 100 individual readings. Each one is different. From ten minutes at a fair to two hours over lunch, the length (and price) can vary. So do topics. And that's the problem with the cookbook, too.

I've hit the wall with it. The cookbook version of a reading, a personal chart interpretation, just doesn't work for me. "No famous Capricorn's were ever musicians," from my text files. Work with this humor: Jimmy Buffet, Robert Earl Keen and, of course, Elvis were all Capricorn Sun individuals.

But I depend on intuition too much in a personal reading, and more than a fair sprinkling of that is not so much intuition, but "art," as I weight various influences, to determine what's the most important element to discuss.

But intuition doesn't get transcribed into a book-length manuscript. Therein is the problem.

Ah to hell with this discussion. I worked on upcoming horoscopes because that's where I really enjoying working. It's getting harder and harder, though to make sure that there are no repeats. I like a good challenge, and that's what I've etched out thus far, a good challenge for myself.

Rather ephemeral, but then, so is life.

Yee-haw.

Originally posted January 15, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Live worms

After consuming coffee and exchanging idle chatter plus details about online diaries, that sweet Pisces and myself hooked it over to what I thought was a new super-center sporting goods store.

I wanted one more Acme Tackle Co. lure. It's something a cartoon character would use.

So we're wandering around the big store, and she asks me, like I know, "Do they have worms here?"

Standing in front of several hundred square feet of plastic worms, all lined up in little bags, with the "special flavor that bass crave!" Garlic, salted, marinated, yeah, they got worms all right. Plus, in they offer a wide selection of colors, many of which, don't occur in nature.

"No, what you're supposed to ask is, 'do you have live worms?'" the kindly clerk suggested.

"Okay, 'do have live worms?'" the Pisces asked.

"Yes, now ask, 'how much do they run?'" the clerk deadpanned.

"How much do they run?"

"They don't run, they usually crawl."

Originally posted February 2, 2004

Starting at the end. In the middle

"Sometimes the cards ain't worth a dime if you don't lay 'em down."

I was vacillating between two songs, the lyrics running back forth in my head, see: these are tunes from an old "road mix" CD, just odd collections of material. Really odd. Consider the other batch of lyrics was something about a man in coonskin cap wants 11 dollars and I've only got ten.

Mix that material with some 80's disco music, then add a touch of 90's metal & punk, and a little techno & country on top. It's a strange brew. However, at 2 in the morning, making a dash through the Gulf Coast night, the roar of the casino still in my veins, yeah, odd works.

I've got a half dozen shots that turned okay, and pretty much cover Friday's madness. Started out slow and easy, picked up a rent car, out of Neons, so I took the big white whale (for a small surcharge). Pointed it down the road, and even before I was out of Austin, I had ideas running around my brain.

There's a shot of the front seat of the car, road mix CD, iPod, phone, coffee, it's all there. That's where I started. The main destination was the Gulf, but I'd pretty desperately wanted some pictures from Goliad. I cruised through Luling, saw a picture I wanted, spun the car around in main street, pulled over, rolled down the passenger window, reached over and took a quick shot of an honorary oil rig in downtown.

See, Luling hit oil in 1922, pretty much put it back on the map for a little while. Makes an interesting triptych,

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an old, possibly abandoned, oil collection set, two pumps, a couple of separation tanks for storing oil and gas — a typical ignored piece of history, and back to back, there was a new cell tower. Mineral rights used to be money, now it's cell towers?

Fast U-Turn, back down the road.

Next up was Gonzales. Yeah, that flag. October 2, 1835, a plucky group of Gonzales residents refused to return the canon lent to them by the Mexican Army (in San Antonio), and that same group of Texicans raised the famous flag: "Come and take it!"

I did a quick lap through downtown Gonzales, and I found an image that begged to have me take the picture, so I popped out of the car long enough to grab a good picture, next thing, I was slinging gravel, and tires squealed.

I passed the famous site of that first stand. Where that flag came from, and I spun around on the highway, bounced through the ditch, and pitched the car sideways, snapped two quick shots of the granite roadside markers, and spun the wheel, headed south again. The background music started with that mixed CD, then I popped in some Brian Burns, and he lightened the load, especially with his version of Col. Travis's letter, and the ballad of the battle. (Songs of the Texians album).

Remember the Alamo, remember Goliad!

As I coasted through the little towns, I got to where I had to get a picture of every roadside historical marker. Didn't have time to read them — just quick, snap a picture, then spew gravel and fishtail back out onto the pavement. The drive-by method of tourism produced a couple of interesting shots. The Feed Mart of Goliad was

one such shot, as was one that followed that, the "Welcome to Nowhere" sign.

Goliad, actually, just the State Park was all that interested me. 318, 342, whatever, Texian prisoners were slain, in cold blood, but due to my delicate nature, I'm not about to poke around that gravesite. Got a picture last time, in other words. So all I wanted was updated material from Mission Nuestra Senora del Espiritu Santo de Zuniga. It's an old CCC project (your tax dollars at work).

I questioned the staff about the skull and crossbones logo, and the staff had their facts wrong, but I was double-parked, I tossed them my two bucks admission fee and hustled on down the road. In case you're wondering, Texas Parks are protected by duly sworn in peace officers. No gravel slinging there. Have to show reverence in the State Historical Parks.

I passed up the concrete structure place, but I didn't pass up Concrete, TX. After reviewing the film, I decided that pictures of every roadside historical marker would be kind of dull. But I do have them for archival purposes.

The dash through the countryside, back roads through the Post Oak Savannah, dropped me off into the coastal plain.

Just in time to make dinner aboard the *Texas Treasure* – Casino (boat).

Originally posted February 8, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

A tipping point

I was inspired by another Sagittarius while I was basically killing time, toying with some web development work that I should be doing, and not really willing to stretch my brain too far. So I was clicking through some Austin stories, and I reread this lad's entry about tipping points.

So it was a touchstone, for me, as I got to thinking about tipping points, little intersections in time and space where something happens, and I make a decision, for good or for ill, and everything changes from that point forward.

Books: *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner. *Albuquerque* by Rudolfo Anya. *Almanac of the Dead* by Leslie Marmon Silko. *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy. *Neuromancer* (et al, ad nauseam) and *Pattern Recognition* William Gibson. *Islands in the Net* and *Heavy Weather* by Bruce Sterling. *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson.

That list spans more than a decade, and I can't recall all the material I had to consume for classes, but that list of "literature" affected me. Those are books I don't want to part with, and that I do, on occasion, refer back to.

There's another book, I don't have, but it made a serious impact, in fact, there's a series of Florida newspaper authors, Carl Hiassen (*Double Whammy*), Dave Barry (*Big Trouble*), and Tim Dorsey (all of his books so far) that have scenes, snippets, dialogue, or just a little piece of action that served as a point that changed me.

Like, with Tim Dorsey's latest book, when I took off for Corpus ten days ago, the manic driving behavior was inspired by one of his main characters, sort of an anti-hero.

There was a Hank III show at the Continental Club, Robert Earl Keen at the Music Hall, and the Jerry Jeff show with special guest Jimmy Buffett. Wayne Hancock on the lawn in front of Threadgill's one night. Transition points.

Robert Rodriguez "Mariachi" trilogy. That one played out Saturday night, in Lubbock, all over again.

I remember a comment, dropped off-hand, from a Scorpio, "Man, you can write this stuff." Fishing Guide to the Stars — a simple comment, probably suggested in jest.

A buddy gave me a copy of REK's "Live #2" and if it was possible to wear out a CD, I wore that one out.

Last fall, I saw a half-dozen performances of Shakespeare's work. Another tipping point. May years ago, I saw (before he was knighted) Ian McKellen's *Richard III*. Again, a performance that was a transition point.

The Cormanc McCarthy trilogy, it gets echoed through my mind any time I'm passing through El Paso. The stark, harsh reality, the desert sands, the bare mountains, the wind whipping down from New Mexico.

Books, movies, music, live performances, events that left me with a different perspective, that's clue.

This isn't all about happy events. I can still recall nasty notes from far-flung locations, and there's some

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messages that do have an impact on me, and it's not always positive. Losses are as important as wins.

I was plotting some of these points, just trying to conjure up the relevant ones, trying to recall what made a lasting impact.

For me, wandering around London during a heat wave last fall, seeing some plays at the New Globe, plus that outstanding performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, those were points, intersections in time and space where my life changed. There's one line from the *Jerry Springer Opera*, a song, that had me laughing so hard, and yet, there was an element in that emotion, those emotions, that ran straight through my own life — stories I hear from clients.

All I've done so far is list some of the points when something happened, and I was changed. Interaction with a piece of artwork. Listening in a workshop at SXSW, something clicked.

This is an aggregate collection of those tiny points, where by chance, by fate, guided by stars, whatever, some kind of interaction occurs. It's like standing in front of a painting, for me, it was a picture of some of Dali's tarot cards — yes, I use them from time to time — and seeing the original.

Coming into Big Bend, a recent frost on the ground, the morning sun providing one of the most incredible scenes I've ever experienced, backlighting the Ocotillo as the leaves were just turning.

Transition points. Changed forever.

Originally posted February 17, 2004

Keyboard Astrology:

Not "keyword" astrological analysis, but keyboard astrology. Folks who "practice" astrology without the human interaction...

I priced astrology services on a related link. Nothing more than \$9.95 in their online astrology shop. Plus, near as I could tell, nothing more than three pages in length, so that's about \$3 per page.

All computer-generated. Keyboard astrology. Never has a human touch.

I was — vainly — searching for wireless access in El Paso/Las Cruces. Fast, broadband, 802.11g WiFi. Couldn't find it. Most Bucks offer 802.11b, significantly slower, but reliable. Which brings up the Starbucks & Astrology example again.

Every Bucks is just about the same, whether it's in the Phoenix Sky Harbor airport, or at the corner of 5th & Lamar in Austin. (Or in the capital building, or at 10th & Congress, or at 6th & Congress, or just north of Amy's on Congress — 5 in less than a square mile.) Or in London, England. All about the same. Same furniture, same design, basically, the same menu. Safe and sanitary. Usually with branded wireless, too. Like those 3-page, \$9.95 astrology reports. Safe, sanitary, and basically the same.

I spent a good portion of Tuesday afternoon in local coffee shops, first Bouldin then Halcyon. I love Bouldin Creek Caffeine Dealer. Cheese omelet, with fresh basil and cilantro, a good cup of coffee, friendly service. With the right person, it's an enjoyable experience. A little

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off-beat, a little funky, and the menu is tad bit different from Bucks. Try ordering chocolate—espresso—Guinness drink in a Bucks. None of the furniture really matches too well in Bouldin. But it matches that South First Street ambiance perfectly.

From what I know of the proprietor of Bouldin, the place is more a labor of love, and less about making money. Reminds me of this place. Alas, like any business, the bills keep coming in.

Originally posted February 18.2004

Two—part harmony:

Both Saturday and Sunday morning, I was awoken to the smell of morning food cooking. Seeing as the guest room is right off the kitchen, this isn't surprising. One morning, it was the smell of chorizo, sizzling in the pan. It has a unique aroma, and it was fresh chorizo, from a health food store, local material, local blend.

I once read the ingredients, while in a supermarket, on the label of the "good" brand of chorizo. It was basically various pig parts, leftovers that couldn't be used in any other fashion. One place in Austin makes its own chorizo, and while it's good, it's not nearly as good as that stuff which is just swept up off the floor of a slaughterhouse. I can't tell about the El Paso brand of chorizo, other than it mixed well with scrambled eggs, and the mixture made a perfect burrito, a little for breakfast and little for later.

There was something calming, invigorating, and altogether unique about waking up to the scents of peppers being boiled for fresh salsa, an onion being sautéed for peccadillo beef, and the coffee pot dripping fresh coffee. Nothing fancy, but the earth tone, the earthen hues, and the smell of a real Southwestern breakfast being started in the early morning, it's one of those experiences that can't be duplicated.

I was running up and down the western flank of the Oregon & Franklin Mountains. Pretty much the eastern edge of the West. El Paso, Southern New Mexico, Ciudad Juarez and old Mexico across the river, the lights in Mexico at night? All laid out like diamonds on a jeweler's black velvet display cloth.

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The second part, and of the experiences I most miss in El Paso proper, is the Tigua Indian Casino. I usually did well there. Liked it. It was fun. And it was closed. Drove most the traffic right across the street to Sunland Park. It's one of those situations, bounce over the railroad tracks and there's another casino, which is so weird, as it's looks like it's in El Paso, but geographically, it's really in New Mexico.

One night that casino. One of the very crowded nights, I watched as two little "mamacitas" were nattering back and forth in Spanish, tipping some solution out of a bottle, rubbing that solution on the slot machine's window, then hitting the numbers. 7—7—7. Again. Again and again. More stuff rubbed on the window.

"Hey," I suggested in a jovial manner, "rub me, too!"

"No. Machine bizzy," she glared. No gringo was going to take her winning machine.

My companion explained, in fluent Spanish, that I just wanted some of whatever it was they were rubbing on the machine? Rub it on me. Rub me.

It was Patchouli. They showed us the bottle. Cheap perfume, linked to winning. It was a Tabasco-branded slot machine, in fact, three in a row, and all three were hot that night. Those little old ladies weren't about to give up their spots. Plus, that bottle of patchouli was almost empty.

The next day, while I was Heart of the Dove, I asked about the other branch, which is a new-age spot called "Ancient Legacies," an aromatherapy place. "Got any patchouli?"

The Moon was in Aries, the faintest sliver sowing right after sunset with Venus making a focal point just past

the Moon's fertile horns, and I had some of that patchouli. We all decided to give it a try.

Did it work? Not until after 11 at night. Then it worked well.

Originally posted February 23, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Two-Meat Tuesday

It's a platter, at the Green Mesquite. Tuesday's special. I worked on a website for a client Tuesday morning. Then I worked with astrology clients for a little while. Then I fished for a short spell, as the sun was playing hide and seek with skittering cloud cover. I finally suited up and rambled off for a late lunch in a packed BBQ joint, and from there, headed towards SXSW, the last day. One more workshop, "Getting it (online)" was the title. Figured it would be good for some humor.

Maybe. Maybe not. Last workshop, last thing for the geek stuff, and everyone was a little burned out. Just an educated guess, but that was what I sensed. Two folks with advanced psychology degrees and the rest of the panel were clowns. Especially one of my favorite Aquarius personalities ("I don't believe that astrology stuff") Ben Brown, local luminary.

Talk about past lives and ex-wives, I ran into a former employee, from, well, a long time ago, in land far, far away. Stuck back in the fog of a forgotten childhood, a grey-headed — now a professor — emerged on a side street near the convention center. I greeted him by his first name. He did the up and down scan, looked twice, blinked, tried to focus, and since I didn't have my badge on, he was having trouble. "Kramer? Kramer!"

3 minutes of catch—up and "I've got to catch a plane chatter." He was a film panelist. I was just a scholarship attendee for the "interactive" — big difference.

He rushed off; I paused, grinned, giggled to myself at running into him, and headed towards the arena. Two local volunteers who apparently know me, assured me

that chuckling to myself was "not allowed." I just couldn't help it. He's been showing up for this thing for 11 years, and this is the first time I've run into him.

"Wow," he kept muttering, "you look good."

I believe he meant "healthy." I was just coming in from a 2-meat platter, I'd cleared zero fish but some good time casting a line, done some miles on the trail, and I was thinking my way through some academic problem.

Shorts, sandals, a little sun crisp, a Hawaiian shirt (made in Hawaii, thank—you—very—much), feeling in top form for a slow Tuesday. That's not what I looked like years ago. Plus, I know that I don't know much. Then? I knew it all. Right. Sure. The folly of youth.

I ran into an ex—girlfriend, current client, and others while I was waiting around for that last workshop. I'm sticking to working out theories, trends, and personality traits with planets. It's what I like to do.

Two-meat-Tuesday is going to lead to a BBQ sojourn, I hope. That's the plan.

Originally posted March 17, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Texas is different but:

El Paso is even more different.

Sunday afternoon, there was a change in the clientele, the numbers skewered in a new direction as I found myself working with a younger and younger grouping. Since I was clad in all black, I tried to pass myself off as a Goth, too. Didn't work. But I did find myself with several rather animated readings, and since the crowd was younger, I could cuss, rant, rave, and bitch about parents. Punk Astrology. It was rather invigorating, although, I've gotten limited feedback thus far.

Monday morning, I started the day with a Gemini, ended the day with a Gemini, and plenty of signs in between, too. I was doing 45-minute readings, more leisurely, more in-depth, and lot different from punk astrology. "Changed my pitch up."

After working for, like, 8 hours straight through, we headed over to Mesilla for some dinner. After cruising up and down Main once (took three minutes), I spied a little place in a local version of a strip mall, "Dick's Café, Mesilla, NM."

Looked like the spot.

We wandered in, looked like locals, and a waitress stepped up. Long, lanky, dishwater blond with a sleepy look to her blue eyes meandered over. I looked at my Aries, "Go ahead and ask her," I said. So it turns out, the waitress was a Gemini.

I asked for a number two dinner, and they really didn't have one, but she made adequate recommendations until the Aries suggested a certain item on the menu.

"El Chingon."

"Do you know what that name means?"

Snicker.

It was a steak covered in queso, with rice and beans on the side. Very worthwhile. Odd name.

I tried to get a colorful shot of the sign for Dick's Café in Mesilla, NM, but the phone's camera wasn't up to the night time exposure with Saturn, the Moon, and Jupiter as backlights.

On the ride back to El Paso, one last client call to return. Gemini.

Originally posted March 30, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Good Friday:

Snakes, for me, are largely totemic creatures.

I used to see a really large Texas Rat snake, swimming in the power plant outlet creek. He was huge, having reached full, adult length, by my guess, close to five feet, maybe longer. Recognizing its yellow and brown markings, it was nothing more than a large garter snake. It was 2001, I think, and I noticed, one afternoon, that someone had freaked out and broken the back of that snake, it was floating along dead in the water. Waste of good spirit, inspired by "snake fever." Or plain, uninformed fear.

Just about every water snake in Texas is assumed to be a Water Moccasin, which just isn't the case. Easily distinguished by a triangular head, and in the mature specimens, a basic black coloring with a faint pattern barely visible. I had a pet one, once, we'd caught him in the middle of the lake and run lasso around his neck, dropped him in a bag. He managed to sneak out of the cage in less than an hour. Gone back to the lake, I'll assume. He was close to four feet in length, and rather nasty. Most Cottonmouths are.

While I was closely observing the baitfish, one morning, I noticed a slithering fellow. Brown skin, not black, the scales on the skin didn't have a "keel," and its head was not triangular, nor, for that matter, was there any pit (it's like an extra nostril between the nose and eye). Constrictor of some sort. Harmless. I let him be and he continued looking for his breakfast.

The next day, on the dock, I looked over, and there was a smaller version, possibly brethren, less than two feet long, and moving pretty fast. I dropped the pole and

went for a closer look, and for the life of me, the only pattern to the back? Boa?

Then the following day, on the Shoal Creek bridge, I looked down, and there was the third water snake. From my elevation, I couldn't tell anything about that one, I really didn't want to go chasing snakes in the creek bottom. It would've been gone by the time I got there.

Three for three. Totems.

Means something's up, that's for sure.

I was taking a quick dip in the creek, first swim for this year, and I was thinking about the snake medicine, or totems, or whatever, and I remembered an event last summer. "No baby, ain't no snakes in Barton Creek; it's too cold."

A little garter snake went swimming by.

Reminds me of the scene, as handed down to me by a professor, "You know, like the 'fat broad' in B.C.? 'Snake! Wham! Wham!' Just like her."

After dark, Friday night, I was "walking the dog" — making a topwater lure behave as if it was a wounded baitfish — and the resident owl came swooping down on the river's surface, just sure that the lure was dinner.

No luck with fish, but damn near caught an owl.

Owl in a cave, during daylight, in CA (Sister can verify that one), baby owl in the backyard, couple of years ago at a party, and now this guy. He was huge. Four—foot wingspan, maybe more, hovering right in front of me, looking at the lure and me.

by Kramer Wetzel

Three for three. Totems. Means something's up, that's for sure.

Originally posted April 10, 2004

Cherokee Nation & Molly's:

Saturday afternoon, we'd wandered off to the Cherokee Nation's Casino, at the corner of I-44 and loop 244. There's something I miss in most Indian Casinos that dot my western landscape — it's that sense of abandon found in places like Las Vegas. There's that idea of emerging from a pit of swirling activity at 4 in the morning, reeking of cigarette smoke, being trailed by the faint aroma of stale alcohol, just isn't like that in the other places.

By my own observations, the Cherokee casino was pretty nice. I'm not sure I agree with all plastic payout but I didn't lose much money — if any at all — with a couple of small to medium jackpots on nickel, dime and quarter machines.

All in good fun. Which lead to the restaurant, like the "Hey, I know this place, I think it's around here..." We paused to ask where the good restaurant was, overlooking the Catoosa (something). My guide asked one guard, and halfway through a lengthy discussion, complete with much arm waving and signal directions, another guard waved me over.

"Go out. Go left. Take a right at the light. Follow the highway. The place you're looking for is about a quarter of mile before the bridge..."

Quarter of a mile before the bridge. Great, I'm sure we can't miss that one. I was waiting for the requisite, "Remember where the barn was before it burned down? You turn there."

Originally posted April 25, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Inbound & haircut:

Ma Wetzel, that darling and charming Scorpio, was in town and insisted on dinner. Works for me. She pulls up in front of the ole trailer, we exchange packages, as I'm sending Mother's Day stuff home with her, and she was dropping off about seven or eight pounds of newspaper clippings and her old *New York Times Review of Books*.

"I really want some vegetables, can we go to Threadgill's?" she asked.

Cool. She usually asks for some place with "linen," you know, white cloth tablecloth, napkins artful stuck in a long-stemmed water glass, that sort of place. A little out of my league these days.

We tuck into to some grub. Aquarius server. The conversation included, "You know, I had dream last night, I dreamed you cut your hair...."

"Wake up in a cold sweat?"

She had the vegetable medley, and she allowed as how the squash and greens were actually better than her own, "This really is better than home-cooking."

At one point, I looked up and Bubba Sean was there. He was delivering paperwork of one kind or another.

I fetched him over, and as one would expect, he was cultured and entertaining, plus he didn't use any harsh language.

Then, seeing as how it was Threadgill's, I paid for dinner. I don't know why that amazed Ma Wetzel so

by Kramer Wetzel

much, I mean, it's not like it's an expensive place or anything. Paper napkins. Red and white check tablecloth, tacked onto the tables and covered with plastic, just a clean, easy access food place.

As we were finishing up, I got in one good line, "If you don't clean your plate, then no dessert for you."

I've waited all my life for that one.

We wandered off to Amy's for dessert, and I dashed across the street for shot of Jo's espresso, aiming to get it loaded up Amy's Mexican Vanilla. One of the scoopers was an Aquarius. That's #2. As I got dashed back, I made worried noises because Ma Wetzel was toying with Capricorn scooper guy.

"I leave her for one minute, I hope she's not bothering you..."

We stopped by the downtown post office, not far from her hotel, so she could buy some stamps.

"It's my office, you know, the mail box," I was explaining.

"No pictures of you on the wall?"

Scorpio — you know — always the comedian.

Originally posted April 30, 2004

That Gulf Coast tale

(or that gulf coast tail?)

Couple of years ago, I was working at an event on the gulf coast. In walks a young lady attired in not much more than a sarong and a bikini top. She was, as I recall, rather amply endowed. Attracted fair degree of attention at the event.

As I recall, she got a reading from me and then suggested that she buy me some dinner.

She came back later in the evening, more suitably clothed, and we left. Had some dinner, listened to a blues band play, and I was back at the hotel, in bed, asleep — by my self — before 11 that night.

I really do live like a monk.

Next morning, when I was particularly well-rested, I received a great deal of chiding about why I was so well-rested. I tried to defend my honor and the honor of the young lady, but to no avail. The more I protested, the worse the ribbing. I just shut up.

Originally posted May 15, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Definitions:

"Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."

— Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister during World War II

"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then Success is sure."

— Mark Twain (1835—1910),

"Success seems to be connected with action. Successful men keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit."

— Conrad Hilton

What was sad was I couldn't verify the Churchill quote via Quoteworld dot org. I've long since discovered that it helps to validate a quote's source before actually using said quote. There's a purported Einstein quote floating around on this site that's probably a fiction, just as an example.

I was going to go on and on about fishing and success. I woke really early Friday morning, and I was well on my way, the clock on the bank building said "5:25 AM, Temp: 79."

The bugs were fierce, especially flies and mosquitoes. Then the fish themselves, I could see them, but they wouldn't deign to do much more than sniff at my worm.

There was a pair of big bass girls, and my bait kept attracting their attention, but once again, they'd get up close, but not try at the bait. The way I see it, they

didn't grow to that size by taking every worm that in drifts front of them.

I cleared a good seven miles, had a breakfast taco, and called it quits. But not before I had a chance to see a few more fish. At the furthest eastern terminus for the trail I was on, where the path, the lake and Pleasant Valley Road are all within a few meters of each other, there's a heavily fished spot. The sun was just clearing the trees, and the area was still shaded. A couple of more black bass swam up close to the edge, right where the shallow part drops off. As they flittered there, I unhooked the lure and gave it one more tentative cast. Sure enough, smart fish, they'd sniff at it, but not strike.

"Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."

Although, as a Sagittarius, I tend to like Mark Twain's words better, and I know that quote can be verified.

"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then Success is sure."

What's the measure of success? Number of fish? Makes me a loser. However, I was actually fishing for several hours, got in a long hike, and by that measure, I thought it was a rather successful morning. All depends on the measurement.

Originally posted June 5, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Mining.

I was stuck in the mine, most of Wednesday.

The "Mine," in my case, at least the way I see it, was all the work that goes into a horoscope. Plus, I was a little stuck for ideas. I've been reading, and been gently amused by, Kinky Friedman's *Kill Two Birds & Get Stoned*. The story itself starts to be about a down and out writer who has writer's block. Something I've not succumbed to lately. But I was stuck, and I can easily blame that novel, so I had to dip into my notes for adequate inspirations.

I keep a running list of ideas, concepts, vignettes, bits and pieces of prose that don't belong anywhere just yet, and I flip through those files to find something that works. Like Xmas lights on a truck in West Texas during the holidays. Or like the sunrise backlighting Ocotillo as the leaves change to Autumn's color. Sunrise over the lake, as seen from the prow of a bass boat. Now that's a special sight. Sunset backlighting Sandy's neon. The smell of hot cooking grease on a summer's night.

So I was mining the memories, looking for something. Not bad place to be, either.

I've just been struck since the Moon was in Taurus then Gemini, by the number of folks who actively fulfill my observation and prognostication that folks seem to get really cranky during the last phase of the last quarter moon.

I didn't let it get to me, but I was hard at work, from basically seven in the morning until five in the afternoon, turning out a column. Then there was also

some production work that needed to be attended before the scopes roll over at midnight.

On top of that, I had to sneak in a nap with the cat, pet the cat, brush the cat, feed the cat, and I had to try my hand at losing bait on snags in the river. Plus, last night, I had a reading to attend to, up the street, just east of here. So that's 7 in the morning until 5 in the evening, with two breaks, then another two hours' work, plus I had to fit in some lunch (ate while typing) and dinner (ate while reading).

The key to happiness? I enjoyed just about every minute of it. I don't care if the moon is doing whatever, or Saturn, or whatever planet it is, I'm happiest when I'm doing what I want to do, even if Venus is retrograde, the trick is to enjoy toiling in the mine.

Originally posted June 17, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Life is short

Eat Dessert First (Amy's dictum)

Got an early wake up call for Saturday morning, off to Dallas for an overnight visit to the folks for Father's Day.

Friday morning, I settled in with some more horoscopes, then I looked at what I was working on, and I thought about it, looked at the clock, and decided that a quick hike and bike trail excursion that left me at the correct destination was in order.

I was hoping I could get by the creek for a cool-off dip, but apparently I'd cut my time a little short.

But sweating in the afternoon sun, cruising along, a stack of astrology charts in hand, I was figuring life was pretty good. As I headed up Congress, towards Jo's, I discovered that the construction project was still underway, and I had to use the other side of the street. The Amy's side. So, I followed my own advice about "life is short, eat dessert first," and fetched up a little Mexican Vanilla. Back across the street to a crowded Jo's, and I poured the ice cream into a double shot of espresso.

From there, we decided that the cool AC at Zen was a lot better than the heat, and I really did want a little raw fish appetizer, so I had dinner, a reading, and their version of ceviche. Or, as I prefer to call it, owing to our Central Texas language mutilation policy, "Servichie."

I was casually fielding client calls later in the evening, and one perspicacious Aries asked, "Are you fishing right now?"

Well, yes, I was. The cordless phone reception stretches out to the river, if the battery's full. I must look a little weird, fishing and talking into the air, but for me? Life is good.

Originally posted June 19, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Feast Day of St. Thomas More

Notable because he was both a lawyer and a saint?

Unrelated:

I was approaching the downtown post office, and I nodded to a lady walking the other direction. In my hand was a tiny cup of espresso and my shirt. My hair was back in a bun. We passed, then, at the same point, we both turned around. Me? For the obvious reason, maybe. Her?

"Kramer? I thought that was you."

We chatted for a spell, she made another offer to let me use her pool atop the high rise, and the conversation meandered around to another topic, "So all those people were saying that you were 'psychic'."

Which brings me to another point. Which I mulled over BBQ after a swim in the creek. "Psychic." Nope, but then, what it is? An innate understanding of the metrics of the heavens, being a little unglued in present reality, and being able to leap forwards and backwards — with respect to those metrics.

More than once, actually, quite often, I'll mention a date to some one, suggest it was time when "something" happened, and I'll get that look of incredulity, "Wow! How did you know?"

It's actually based on the scientific location of the planets — or more simply — heavenly bodies, like the Sun, the Moon, but all that chatter about planets and degrees, or so I've found, isn't very interesting. But the results of that planetary movement, that is interesting.

Therein is the distinction, too. Nor, for that matter, ever am I right, like 100% of the time. Sometimes, I'm guessing one way on an influence, and it shows up opposite.

But often as not, I'll hit a date, or time frame is more likely, and I can discern a trend. Or suggest a trend. Looks like voodoo, and more than one of my buddies will just roll his — or her — eyes when I start in with the 'what's your birthday' commentary.

You want a real psychic? I can suggest a couple of local girls, but no, I'm not one of them.

Originally posted June 22, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Stops along the road

Several stops are required. One must always stop and gawk at certain roadside art. Like Stonehenge II, the Cadillac Ranch, the boot farm, the frogs on Carl's Corner, and so forth. Then, there's the requisite Dairy Queen stops, the occasional foray (no purchase necessary) into the tinier Wal-Marts along the way, personally, I usually hit the hardware, feed & seed stores, plus any fishing stores, and then local taco stands. Those are good, too. Plus discreet inquiries about where to find a decent chicken friend steak and good, local BBQ.

But the other stop that should really be required, even if one is just passing through Texas? Check out the basic roadside rest areas, and, if you pass a "highway information center," those can be a wealth of information. There's one on the interstate just around Amarillo, highly recommended.

There's carousel after carousel of brochures. Local attractions. Local motels with various themes. The help can usually direct a wayward tourist to some local attraction that's really, well, almost, okay, sometimes, pretty interesting.

How else are you going to find Hotel Earle (motto: A Day or a Lifetime)?

Originally posted June 22, 2004

Two-Meat Tuesday

I tend towards Democratic ideals, and I'm rather fond of a number of the projects done by the old CCC (I never can remember how many letter are in that name), and I try to stay away from political intrigue, comments and rants in both the horoscopes themselves, and right here.

But an allegory has presented itself. I was just with my parental units over the weekend, albeit briefly, and we all agreed that the current situation is untenable. It did get me thinking because parents tend to bring up childhood memories.

"Why do parents push your buttons? They installed those buttons."

I had pet snakes, lizards, and the occasional tarantula, perhaps more out of my father's boyish glee than any real interest on my part, at least as far as the arachnids were concerned.

However, the snakes always interested me. I read about them, caught them, kept some as pets, much to the chagrin of other family members, and I still have an abiding sense of marvel at the scaled reptiles in general, plus I've added several other animals to my list of critters to watch.

For a while, "Snake Medicine" was very powerful and the local snakes were totems for me. A good, strong signal, and the results were invariable. Good stuff, simply put. Changes, sure, but good stuff nonetheless.

But lately, there's been a lot more snakes. I can safely identify most of these, like, it's almost as if they all

by Kramer Wetzel

come from the same family, same kind of scales, same patterns, probably same species, genus, phylum, and so forth, right on down to the subclass and genre.

However, even like the last time I saw one, I was standing on a stump, looking over a cove, fishing my little heart out, and this one guy came up close. Close enough to touch. He was a good three feet long. He saw me, I saw him, and he froze in the water. Then he swam on around me and my location, on into the shore's brush.

Now, I'm pretty sure he was nothing more than harmless constrictor, and not a very large one at that. Not being enough to inflict any damage on me. But there's still the visceral reaction, "Snake!" Followed by quick steps in the other direction, or the sound of some heavy object being repeatedly bounced on the snake's current estimated location. Hit it with a big stick or rock, right?

The head, on that one snake, was an isosceles triangle, not equilateral, and the eyes were visible above the elongated jaw line, hence, a pretty good indication that the snake carried no poison, as the pit vipers (copperhead, water moccasin, and rattler) all share certain characteristics, easily noted by their triangular head, eyes that are not visible from the top, and various markings.

Now, I read a great deal — perhaps too much — into seeing certain critters appear. Probably too much time spent around the flakes in my business, the new age seers, "professional mediums," and worst of all, the folks who help themselves to a portion of the native aboriginal culture without embracing it all. So totems mean something to me, but the snakes are occurring way too often and that's diluted their meaning, for me.

Like that one, when I was on the stump, fishing. I'm pretty sure he was harmless. But that didn't lessen my native instinct to strike. My rational brain went into over-ride mode, and I kept from making any sudden movements, the better to observe nature. I wanted to be sure that the snake wasn't going to either take my lure or my fish.

Pit viper poison is rarely fatal, due, in part to modern medicine and anti-venom that works like it's supposed to, plus the pit vipers usually only attack when there is no other option.

Except for water moccasins. Those guys can be just plain mean, especially when they reach full adult size. Easy to spot, though, usually black with faint traces of pattern on the back, and the older ones have yellow belly, as compared to the more white bottom scales of a regular snake.

On that stump, in the pre-dawn twilight, suppose that snake had decided to help himself to my position, what would've been the outcome? The butt of the pole I was using is fairly heavy, good chance it would've been aimed for his head.

Moral? Don't bother me when I'm fishing.

Originally posted June 23, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Going Coastal:

I still remember the singer's song. It was an "open – mic" affair, one evening, and the guy was obviously from the coastal bend area. The lyric, the refrain that stuck with me? "Thirty minutes from the coast and three minutes from hell...."

Not my sentiments, but an artful expression of longing, desire, and location.

Lulling: home to some of the earlier oil wells in Texas. Got a hysterical marker in the middle of town. The Gulf Coast, with the oil rigs anchored offshore. Texas: we ain't very far from our mineral rights.

"The average cowboy is an excellent judge of horseflesh, only a fair judge of men, and a terrible judge of women, particularly 'good women.'"

Larry McMurtry writing *In a Narrow Grave* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 1968. p. 149.)

Ain't nothing better than waking up to the cry of seagulls.

I asked the kid at the "front desk" for a dinner recommendation. "Try the wharf, good food."

I asked if I could enter barefoot, "No, probably better wear sandals. Although, this is Port A, never can tell."

Originally posted July 1, 2004

Introductions:

I was sitting at the keyboard, and my sister wanted to know what I was doing.

"I need to write an introduction for this week's column," I said.

"Well, I think you should write about how fabulous Gemini's are, and how amazing it is to travel with them. You know, this is the time after Gemini and all, you should really talk about how good Gemini's are."

Or how they bitch enough so they don't have to sleep on the roll-away? Or how they introduce you to everyone as "my brother from Texas who just got off the airplane and he really needs (coffee, food, women, art, theater, &c.)"

"Oooo! Somebody put a tiger in my pants!" (Sister is a little weird.)

"Britain is a world by itself."
Shakespeare's *Cyberline* (III.i.12)

Britain may be a world unto itself, per Shakespeare, but traveling with an adult child, like my sister, is stranger. She was discussing butt plugs.

All because I'd picked up a Cuban cigar. (Monte Cristo in a tube). Which lead to her discussion of broccoli butt plugs. Suddenly I look like the sane one in this family. Sane, rational, level-headed. Dare I suggest it? Normal?

Originally posted July 6, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Uncool:

"Keep your decaf mocha latté, just pour me a cup of coffee — I'll do my own thang and be uncool..."
(Old Derailers off *Genuine*)

"If the trailer don't blow away in the next hurricane, they'll be together til their dieing day..."
(Luke Olson's "Gulf Coast Romance" from the album *Uvalde*)

I think it's called snogging not blogging.

Canyon lands. So weird, I get strolling in some of the neighborhoods around here, the "summer sun of York" still not streaming into the narrow streets, and all I can think about are man—made arroyos and canyons. Dry Gulch. Wet Gulch.

It started to rain during the play. I had a great shorthand term for the play, Measure for Measure, I was using this form "M4M." But I looked at that and wondered where I'd seen that before. Not exactly my style.

But the play itself? That was a wonderful production of *Measure for Measure*.

Bloom on Shakespeare:

"Shakespeare, piling outrage on outrage, leaves us morally breathless and imaginatively, bewildered, rather as if he would end comedy itself, thrusting it beyond all possible limits, past farce, long past satire, almost past irony at its most savage." (p. 359)

"... above all, of the convict Barnardine, who has the wisdom to stay perpetually drunk because sober in this mad play is to be madder than the maddest." (p. 359)

I think Bloom missed the mark. The players, I saw about half dozen of them that I'd seen before in other roles, were quite good. Well nigh on excellent. Exceptional. Perhaps it's a problem play, but there was a kick at the end, and that kick caught me completely by surprise. One of those twists.

Catching me completely unaware, though, that just spoke to the quality of the production, the pacing, the staging, well, everything. That was good. I was wondering why I kept thinking of it as "savagely funny."

Very good. It's just so right to see a play in that atmosphere. Funny thing, from what I've gathered, the regular London theater community tends to regard the Shakespeare's Globe as sideshow and tourist trap. Which is the furthest thing from the truth.

The folks sitting in the plastic ponchos under the rain? The cheap seats? They got treated to the bawdy jokes. The folks further up, like in the rafters? Players would lift their eyes when referring to the "heavens" or the more wealthy patrons.

All worked. All worked well. Plus, that little bit of rain — who'd a thunk it would rain in London? The rain made a good point. The stage is probably a little larger than the real stage. But the actors rarely used the outer most portion. So that when it did rain, the actors would be relatively sheltered from the elements. Almost as if the place was designed by an actor with actors in mind.

Suit the action to the words, the words to the action, no sawing of the hands, and how does that one quote go?

by Kramer Wetzel

Anyway. I am much worried about the mental health of my traveling companions. So far, Sister and friend have laughed at almost every joke I've made. Even I wouldn't laugh at some of my jokes. I think those girls, I figure their mental health is in question.

"But Kramer, you're funny."

Even I won't go that far.

And remember, "No downward dogs on the first date." (Sister was doing yoga — I know I would never do a downward dog on the first date).

Originally posted July 8, 2004

Burgers:

Tate Modern. Retrospective of Edward Hopper.

You know who Edward Hopper is? Think "diner." Think of the boulevard of broken dreams and every other knockoff of that one diner picture (done in 1942). The guy who did that painting the first time — that's the one.

What was weird, seeing it in the flesh? Standing straight in front of it, it looks like a painting, but moving off to the left side? The characters, the woman, the soda jerk, the other guy sitting at the bar? They all seem to move forward, move around, almost leap out of the painting.

Yeah well, it's the Tate Modern and it's such a wonderful space to view art. Plus, imagine this: Lamb Burger & Dorset Crab in the café for lunch. Little black sheep done up as a burger and a real crab from England's southern coast. I like me my southern food.

We were cruising down the street and found a "ticket vendor" or "booking agent," as the lad styled himself. Plus, after watching the guy work, he had a closet for an office, two or three phone lines going constantly, we managed to snag some tickets to an already sold-out show, Theatre Complicité's version of *Measure for Measure*, at the National Theatre.

Pompey: Yonder man is carried to prison.

Mistress Overdone: Well! What has he done?

Pompey: A woman.

Mistress Overdone: But what's his offence?

Pompey: Groping for trouts, in a peculiar river.

by Kramer Wetzel

We all pooled our resources, and sister and friend had to go in search of a cash machine, while I waited in line.

"Yeah," I drawled, "I sent my wimmins off to turn a few tricks."

"Right. Over in Soho?"

"Yeppers, they'll be right back."

A few minutes later, the girls rounded the corner with the cash.

The end of the evening we found ourselves at the Hard Rock. The Hard Rock. Not the chain, but the first one, the original. Decent burger, a bacon-cheese burger.

While I was worried about everyone's mental health earlier, I'm less concerned now. They all stopped laughing at every joke.

And somewhere in between, there was theatre. Which is, as they advertise, all 37 plays by William Shakespeare, in 97 minutes. While much of it was silly and tremendously amusing, the best bit was one of the lines, "*Hamlet*? That's not a Shakespeare play, it's Mel Gibson movie."

I guess you had to be there. We were?

Originally posted July 10, 2004

Pilgrimage:

I started by reciting the first half—dozen lines from Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, much to the chagrin of my fellow travelers. But Sunday, after coffee and so forth, it just seemed right. And away we went.

First stop was outside some train station, and I got to clown around with one of my favorite writers, Oscar.

Finally made it to the Canterbury Cathedral.

Couple of tales from the trip. First off, right outside some church, before every leaving London, there was an Oscar Wilde memorial or sculpture, or something. I got to play on it. Then it was that long ride out to Canterbury. I'm guessing it's about 60 miles, and it took about an hour on the train, which is a far cry shorter route from the days when the pilgrims left Southwark and took turns making up stories to entertain themselves.

Lord knows, I would only tell the truth: nothing but the facts.

We stumbled off the train and into the street in front of the station in Canterbury, and I scratched my head. I've been here before, but I didn't recognize anything. I was studying the map on the wall, see the busking picture? Didn't make enough to buy a map, so I was looking at the map on the wall, and a couple pedals up on a tandem bicycle.

Cute couple. Dreds. The guy might've been my age. "Which way's the cathedral?" He pointed one way, his companion pointed the other direction, and then, a after

by Kramer Wetzel

a long discussion, they agreed that her way was the shorter, more direct route. That tandem bike looked like fun, too.

"Only if you can communicate well," was her reply.

So the story goes, we staggered into some really good pizza along the bank of some river, at a little place selling Italian food. Then we meandered in an around the cathedral itself. It really is a special place for me, I mean, I like the architecture and all, and it's been a holy place since, well, long before Christianity built any castles there. Plus, it's just an amazing structure to stand in, and look up. And then there's the sign.

"Martyr — this way."

Yes, we all have a mother or two who could use that very sign. As we passed one of the side chapels, one of the girls had to ask, "Hey, is that the gift shop?"

A little later, I got to ask, meant that as a joke, right?

"No, there were these nice tapestries, a few candelabras, I just thought it was the gift shop, you know, you could buy some saints or something...."

The sun was playing hide and seek, and as the clouds parted, there was that little bit of sun, I popped my hat on, and posed at the edge of the churchyard. Remember the tag line from that store in Austin?

"No one ever got laid wearing plaid."

Good enough.

Originally posted July 12, 2004

Paris, two items:

With one extra day to do nothing, or rather, with nothing planned, we had a chance to shop at all those cute little stores on the West Bank.

I'm pretty secure in my manhood, in that, I can carry around a couple of bags of girls' stuff and not be too offended. However, I will admit, there's just no way to stand outside of a specialty boutique and look macho. Just doesn't happen. No amount of posturing can cure that. The girls were at one store, and I wandered across the street to a chocolate shop. I was looking for some kind of special chocolate bar to fulfill a request for an Austin girl, surely a simple request. I bought candy bar, rather, a bar of fine Paris chocolate, and hopefully, that'll do.

Two of the girls joined me in the chocolate store, and they cavorted around the various piles of candies, rich and redolent with that fragrant aroma of pure cacao, and one of them begged for some change to pay for a small purchase, just a slice of nougat.

"Ooops, I don't have any more money," I said.

The clerk took one look at me, and in English, "Paris is very expensive with two women."

"Oh that's nothing, he has four."

Yeah, us Texans, we're like so... je ne sais quoi — but then, I don't know what. "*Qui est ta pere?*"

Originally posted July 15, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

I shore do like them French ways:

"Eating, for the French, isn't a matter of life or death — it's all much more serious than that."

"I guess I didn't know" (Crystal Method, *Vegas*, "Busy Child")

"We think the subtle—witted French
Conjurers and sorcerers." Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part I*
(I.i.25—6)

Dinner, the other night, we started at 7:30, more realistically, about 8:00, and we finished at about 10 minutes after 11 PM. I was dining with an old chum from way back, I mean, way—way back. He was doing a tour of duty in Paris, with his family, and we got together for the most pleasant of evenings, "Yeah, the French are really serious about their pleasures."

On our way to the Tunnel station, we got together with some of Sister's friends again, and found ourselves in yet another famous bistro, Café Flores. Some us had "steak sashimi" whereas that Pisces ordered "Welsh Rarebit," which was mispronounced "Welsh Rabbit."

When that Welsh Rarebit showed up, I howled.

"That's queso. Can't fool me, that's queso!"

I was corrected, but then, it's a cultural reference. I've had Welsh Rarebit before, and I never did understand why cheese toast was so expensive, but like everything else I experienced in Paris, they do food right.

It was a bubbling bowl of cheese. Apparently, there was a piece of French toast settled on the bottom, but the cheese mixture itself? Yeah, that's queso, in my terminology.

"Welsh rarebit, my ass."

As Brandon Jenkins sings: "I love to hear those engines wind." (from *Unmended*, real red dirt music)

Listening as the Euro-Star winds up and launches down the rails towards England. *N.B.*, one can see fish from the observation deck while under the Channel.

Originally posted July 17, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

One last image:

It's the reason I enjoy the sound of keyboard, or more important, the sound of an ink nib scratching on parchment. Right, like I'm ever going to do it that way.

Over one of the lengthy dining engagements in Paris, I found myself talking about comfort zones, and taking one step outside of a comfort zone — that's how progress is made. In that example, over dinner, or maybe it was lunch, breakfast? I don't recall, one of them, over that meal, I was describing an astrological — metaphysical concept to my companions, about how one step out of the comfort zone is what is required.

Two different nights in Paris found us along the Seine, the fabled "Left Bank," I'm guessing, not more than half a mile east (might've been west for all I know) of the Louvre. Might've been between the Louvre and Notre Dame. There was a museum, and through the gates, two pieces of art were clearly visible. One was, as expected, a giant Picasso sculpture thing. The other was another piece, of a familiar artist.

Understanding and recognizing such an artist, then naming the artist and citing examples — from the Texas desert?

Should've impressed my traveling companions, all artists, all far more educated in such matters. After all, I was the yahoo—hayseed in the straw cowboy hat, the guy who couldn't get enough of that excellent French coffee. And steak. They do know how to do that, cook, or better yet, uncooked cow, that's for sure.

It's all about taking that one step outside of the comfort zone. Paris was like that, as far as I was concerned, one step outside of my inner-city London theatre & museum districts. Strange food in a strange land.

However, Texas is still bigger than France.

I'm still waiting on my soul to catch up with me, I figure I'm still lost in the turbulent currents of the mid-Atlantic, trying to get caught up with my body.

A swim in the creek, a cup of coffee, a hot dog with cheap yellow mustard? I'm back in Austin. 90 degrees seems almost cool, too.

Originally posted July 20, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

I may be wrong but:

It's "the other side of Saturn."

Or the Dark Side of the Moon?

It's a consultation question versus a piece of symbolism. What does one planet represent? I was faced with a question, and I've drifted back towards a more traditional interpretation of Saturn these days. Frankly, the influence of Saturn is like that of a wet cotton blanket, and that's an especially apt metaphor on a hot summer afternoon in Central Texas. Sodden, weighing heavier than it should, that cotton blanket is starting to ripen a little, maybe grow some sort of science—project kind of mold, like agar in a Petri dish.

But back the idea of what a particular item represents, or the energies that a planet brings to a situation. I love me my Saturn, once friends are made, once a relationship with a particular planet is established, there's a pattern that will emerge. Saturn — he's in Cancer these days — is not particularly a nice planet. Sure, you've seen the pictures, the rings and all. Plus there's ongoing space research, but what of the symbolism?

Someplace, buried in my books, somewhere, probably in Latin as well as in English, there's a bit from an early astrologer. Astronomer. Same thing, back close to 2K years ago. Something about Saturn was really easy to predict with, being a great big bad guy as a point in the sky. Not as bright as Jupiter, but carrying a great deal of weight, nonetheless.

Saturn tends to push folks around. A lot. It's not all bad, but there's that onerous weight of work, as opposed to leisure time.

I started on an essay about Saturn, and my red-headed Capricorn friend called, "Hey, are you home? Want to walk today? It's nice out. If I don't go with you, I might not get out."

So I adjusted my schedule — which means in real life? I took a nap. That Capricorn in question is notoriously late. Two more calls, including a wake-up call, almost two hours later. Which also means I forgot all about whatever I was going to say about Saturn. Saturn is the planet associated with the sign Capricorn, in case the symbolism slipped by unnoticed.

We walked. We talked. Halfway around the trail, it was a short loop, barely three miles, she was complaining about her hip—leg—foot—some—part that was giving her pain. We stopped, and she stretched.

"If that's all I have to do to relieve the pain, I should've been doing this long ago."

A little later, she was tired, but I was still merrily trucking along, she was complaining about a certain issue.

"Look, I'll pay you to do a reading for me on this one," she said.

Halfway through the walk, not much of a trek for me, she stopped and stretched the sore muscles, relieving the pain.

Saturn's like that, you know. Doesn't mean that she can stop, halfway through the Saturn exercise, though.

by Kramer Wetzel

Diligent work is still required. The other halfway back to the trailer park.

So I forgot all about whatever Saturn point I was trying to make. It was profound, I'm sure. I'm deep like that, at times.

As I was getting ready for the call—in radio show, I was straightening up the kitchenette. I noticed that — somehow — the only item I needed to buy during the day? Coffee. And somehow or another, I'd managed to neglect that chore. Purchase. So with just minutes to go, I slipped out and up the street to buy beans.

"Italian roast: Sturdy & roasty—sweet" (with hints of chocolate and musty wine flavors and strong finish, I suppose.)

Saturn will do that — make somebody forget to buy beans. Not a problem at night, but decidedly a problem first thing in the morning.

Originally posted July 27, 2004

Much Ado About Nothing:

The problem? Perhaps one of the best performances by a certain star as the constable (Dogberry) is this version.

"O that he were here to write me down an ass! But masters, remember that I am an ass; though it not be written down, yet forget not that I am ass."

Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* Act IV, scene ii, lines 75—77

"And masters, do not forget to specify, when the time and place shall serve, that I am an ass."

Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* Act V, scene i, lines 49—50

I'm working on it. A little Shakespeare, and with apologies, "I'm taking horoscopes where they've never been before."

The Pink Panther (at the Paramount).

True story; I tell the ticket cashier that I'm only 14 years old. She laughed, and I got in on a discount. Scorpio. Figures, right?

Wonderful silly show. A little short on continuity, but what's a few problems with reality in movie that's all fun?

Originally posted July 29, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Blue Moon Rising?

As we ask the lyrical question, "When will I wake up? Escape from this crazy dream?" (Los Lonely Boys) *N.B.*: need to cut back on that morning cigar habit.

Bunch of unrelated stuff:

Blue Moon was loosely defined as a 4th full moon in a 3—month period until the 1946 Sky and Telescope came up with the definition of two full moons in one month. The web is useful for useless information like that.

Talked to people on the phone, typed scopes, typed answers to questions. Went for walk, and I stopped at Austin own Mexic-Atre Museum for the *Mexican Calendar Legends* exhibition.

I took a couple of notes, as there was some breathtaking works of art. Two items stood out. Maybe more. One was picture of a light brown haired woman with a bow and arrow, I think, most folks would call her blond, and she was standing in front of an antelope, I'm guessing here, but the title to the piece was "Diana, the Huntress." Mixing a little mythology here, but it worked.

The Mexican tricolor was quite visible, along with the Virgen de Guadalupe, as was something else that stood out. Betty Page? She ain't got nothing on any of them models depicted. Nipples. Seemed to be a cold season, for all the years concerned.

Instead of an 8—inch square reproduction, some of the pictures were up to five feet tall, maybe more. Perhaps "Mexican Calendar Art" isn't common everywhere, but it's pretty endemic in my world.

And pretty amazing. The use of sunlight in *Veracruz Natives* (1950), or the simple, classic lines of a nude in *La Estrellita* (1946).

After the museum, it was a guilt trip. I've been playing phone tag with my parents, and while Ma Wetzel was in the mountains with spotty cell service? I let her know I'd need years of therapy for my own mother hanging up me.

"I didn't hang up on you, the phone dropped the call," she said.

Once in a while, it's nice to throw a little of that back, "My own mother. Hanging up on me. And I've been so worried about you."

Swim in the creek. Drink a shot of espresso. Saunter off to Baby A's to meet a couple that I'll be marrying at the end of the month. Sagittarius and Aries. Oh this is fun, a "pre-marital consultation with the minister (me)." Not joking, everyone's mom called during that meeting. In-laws and out-laws. Deep East Texas meet New York City.

"Mom, we're talking to the guy who's going to marry us, okay?"

It rained like a cow urinating on a flat rock, but after happy hour was over, so was the rain. Once again, I sauntered off in one direction, got a call, and turned around to meet Bubba Sean at Sandy's. There's a reason why I stay off of Barton Springs Road whenever possible. I ran into a Cancer, an Aquarius, a Leo & her Libra, and finally, Mr. Astrowhore dot org. We were watching a drama unfold while eating ice cream, in front of Sandy's when I saw a familiar visage in the front seat of a mini-van, some of my suburban friends. Libra,

by Kramer Wetzel

Libra, Aries son. Small world. Sooner or later, everyone turns up on Barton Springs Road, I guess.

Or maybe only once in a blue moon.

Originally posted July 30, 2004

Shakespeare & then some:

To say nothing of the dog, either.

The Hideout had a little ad for a production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Figured, it was free, sure, nothing better on a Friday night. Maybe two or three people would show up, and we'd be entertained then I could write a scathing review of how badly mangled the words were, and what poor production qualities were employed, and just being back from "over yonder," I'm sure nothing would be worth mentioning.

Okay, a little history, see, in real Elizabethan Theatre, back in Shakespeare's day, the plays were more a set of crib notes, scattered fragments that each actor was given, at times, right before going on stage. No real script. All in the head of the prompter, or director. Or play write. So, Poor Tom Productions did a version of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* just like that.

I'd be tempted to use words like "amazing" and "wonderfully entertaining," but after some thought, the best way to describe it? Spirited.

With more than a passing nod to the historically correct version, allegedly just supplying the actors (and actresses) with nothing more than their fragments, the play comes together in a slightly halting fashion. Maybe a half-dozen times, some one asked for a line. After the intermission, the prompter acknowledged that maybe a beer on the break wasn't the best idea, as he was completely lost. Which just lead to a more intimate feel, and each production is probably a little different. To be sure, the crew certainly seemed to have fun.

by Kramer Wetzel

The diction, I got lost in the story and action, and I never noticed if it was right or not, which would lead me to suspect that the diction and speech was done properly. Go see what Hamlet has to say about how an actor is supposed to let the words fall trippingly or whatever, and not sawing the air with hands.

Then there was the dog. Launce rails mercilessly at the dog, and real dog was used. Not a prop, but a very sweet critter named Achilles. The dog hammed it up, and he actually stole the show at one point, licking an errant photographer, much to the delight of the audience.

The musical interlude, the piece that lead into the intermission? "Dude looks like a lady," (Aerosmith) — which was even better because one of the girls in the story was dressing as a man, and now we're back to history, when, in Elizabethan times, it would've been a boy dressed as a woman, dressed as a man. Funny.

The costumes, if that's what they were, looked like thrift store material as much as anything. Except for the woman playing the Matrix—look—alike. The character was some kind of bad-ass, and she did the black overcoat, and she was armed with two guns. Water guns. Scowling, she did dampen the audience a little. Didn't dampen the enthusiasm, though.

Costumes, lighting, stage direction, it was all okay, but nothing can replace the sheer excitement that the players brought to the stage. Spirited.

One of the two gentlemen of Verona, Valentine, was bemoaning his fate, and he started to cry on the prompter's shoulder, snuffing big tears.

I'm not sure it's in the text, but at the point, the prompter was prompted to say, "There are no more lines in this act."

Very, very funny.

The whole thing was good. I judge a play based on how sore my butt gets. I was a little sore on the thin theater seats during the first half. I never noticed any pain for the second half.

The spokesperson and ticket taker (it was free — work with it) came out before the second half and suggested, "That it all gets crazy now." Oh yeah.

Sometimes a performance is carried by a single star, but if there was but one star on that stage, it was the dog. Other than the dog? It was an excellent production, and rather even-handed. I would wonder if the dropped lines were rehearsed for their comic timing seemed to fit. Might just have been a good show.

Two more performances this weekend, at the Dog & Duck pub, check listings for details.

The best part? The dog. Maybe it was the guys playing the two gentlemen. Maybe it was the girls playing the girls. Or the girl playing the boy. Or maybe it was the two servants, or even the supporting roles, they were good, too. In fact, there wasn't a weak bit in the play.

Me? I want a job as a prompter: no lines to memorize, just stand there and follow the script. That would be good, about my speed.

Or the dog.

Originally posted July 31, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Busy schedule:

I'm off to the airport, and from thence to El Paso, for a weekend of work. Sort of strange a day spent traveling is like, the lightest day of the week. I've had a busy schedule full of consultations, which, of course, interferes with my laid-back lifestyle. Not that I'm complaining, either.

If I'd only heard this once, then I'd dismiss it as an anomaly, but what I've heard a couple of times over the last few days? I can't quote the words exactly, but the concept is that a client goes and sees (big-name astrologer/psychic who charges a bucketful of money) and gets nothing. I'm sort of stuck, see, with astrology, there's the science part — where the planets are — and then there's the art part — what those symbols mean.

The position of the planets is science. The interpretation is conjecture, intuition, or, in my case, a lot of observed behavior correlated to those planets and their positions. Plus a dose of "art" for the sake of the interpretation.

"More matter with less art" (Hamlet's Mom to Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.)

What seemed to be lacking, though from the big-names? Compassion. There was compassion the first time, but in subsequent visits, there was a lack of compassion. These are people, not machines. People make choices. On some occasions, we all make ill-advised decisions. Imagine that.

Those of us who live in houses with a lot of windows? I've learned not to throw big, heavy objects — I'd hate to shatter the semi-permeable membrane I'm wrapped

in. Don't want to be stuck there, nekkid for the world to see. Well, maybe that wouldn't bother me too much, but I'm sure it would upset some of the neighbors.

What struck me, hearing several times in two days, was the basic lack of compassion from folks who supposedly spend a lot of time dealing with people.

Now, granted, the world would be a much better place if everyone did what I told them to do. The first time. But the world doesn't work like that.

In the words of Will Rogers, that great man from Oklahoma:

"There are three kinds of men — the ones that learn by reading — the few who learn by observation and the rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves."

I wonder if my compassion, especially recently, I'm wondering, does that come from the fact that I wasn't sure this thing was electric?

Originally posted August 19, 2004

Friday Five

Is there still a Friday Five around? I don't know. Never did play well within the confines of the rules, but then, I've never really had much of a problem finding material to write about.

1. A couple of days ago, I was intrigued by Mistress Fredlet's question, who do you want to be when you grow up?
2. I always thought I wanted to be a rockstar, but that would greatly interfere with my lifestyle, the teeming hordes of groupies alone would interfere with my solace while fishing. From what I can discern, my lack of musical ability wouldn't be much of an obstacle. Plus, I get worn out enough from working two days a week, I'm not sure I could tour incessantly.
3. I thought a reporter—at—large would be a good gig, too, but that one's not going to work, either. "We have an armed intruder, cover that story...." "Uh, did you say 'heavily armed'? I think I left the coffee pot on at home — I'd better skip this one."
4. There was a feller who worked the same circuit I do, way back when, always a sharp dresser. I'd figure I'd like to be like him, only be a professional gambler. But to do that? I'd have to win more than I do. As it is, I only rate poor amateur.
5. I've been writer, and had a secret desire to be classified as a writer, for years. First publication was artwork, then a poem, back when I was but a mere whisp of a lad. Now, if I could just combine a little Shakespeare, some fishing lore, and get around a topical

subject, I might have a winner. I think that's who I want to be.

Thursday morning's mailbag contained a couple of highly complimentary notes. I might not be pleasing all the people all the time, but at least a couple of souls are enjoying my efforts and rewarding me with nice notes.

It's always a mad dash to get to the airport, what with Mercury confusing issues and so forth. I didn't want to be bereft of coffee beans when I return, so I had a last-minute dash to the store. Which reminded me about me selfless, undying love and adoration for all things Leo.

Just for the record, "I walked six miles, each way, in the snow, with bare feet, using barbwire for shoes, uphill both ways. Barefoot. In the snow. Uphill."

(Really, all that happened was I got stuck reading a book late into the night.)

The flight last night? Did I mention Mercury was retrograde? Did I mention I've found a sure—fire cure for Mercurial Mayhem? Two shots of airport espresso and a large scoop of Amy's Mexican Vanilla ice cream. Smooth, rich, creamy delight.

"Plane's two hours late?" High—pitched giggle,
"Mercury's retrograde."

I half expected to start seeing tracers. Good thing I was wearing the wedding ring, one of them. Maybe I'll tell why, later.

Originally posted August 20, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Perfect timing — Virgo time

Why would I be concerned about messing around the exact location of the planets for a time to gamble? Just a whim, but it never hurts to stack the deck whenever possible.

I was looking for a window that "as good as it gets" for the time being. Communications are in turmoil because the Mercury situation is what it is.

The invitation was to wander up to the Mescalero Apache "Inn of the Mountain Gods" casino in Ruidoso. Sounded all right, I guess, a nice afternoon in the mountains, a brief respite from the desert heat? I wasn't much into the idea tossing away hard-earned money, so I portioned out a little bit of precious cash, set it aside, and picked the best time to hit the casino.

"Dude, no dude, I swear, the slots are a lot looser in Ruidoso. You know those flaming 7 machines with 4 reels? I hit it for \$400 on Saturday."

I was watching the clock, thinking about the phase of the moon versus the phase of the sun, and all those astrology goodies.

"Can we eat something besides Mexican food?"

In Tularosa, NM, there's an old fashioned drive-in. It's called the Al—O—Mar Drive—in and Diner. Two burgers, covered with Hatch Green Chiles, fries, drinks. Less than ten bucks. Very, very good. It's like stepping back in time. There was even a smoking section, more folks there. Just felt right, a step off the tourist trail, into a land that's little different, and the rhythm, is more in

tune with the way the sun rises and sets, or so it felt like.

From there, we meandered up the road, laboring into the higher elevations. The old casino and inn is closed for remodeling, so we went to the temporary one, a few miles closer to Ruidoso. Wandered in, wandered about and since I have a very real connection to Roswell, NM, I wound up playing a nickel video slot called "Area 51." \$20 became \$400. "All jackpots paid by attendants." \$409 to be precise.

I have two roulette theories, and I've done a little computer modeling to see how the theory works. Looks good mathematically, so I figured I'd give it try. I watched while another guy pulled in over 2 grand, but his system was too wild for me to figure out. I did see 17 hit 3 times in a row (I was outside on that, so I broke even), and a half dozen spins later, 17 hit again. With my chip on it. I hit the "35 to 1" spots twice, and I wound up with an extra ten dollars more than I started with. 17 hit one more time, that guy was raking in the dollars, shouting, "Praise the lord," and I cashed out—still up. Better yet, I was still up with the casino's money.

Casinos and gambling are filled with pitfalls, and the very theme preys on basic human instincts like greed. So I tucked half that money back into my pocket, considered that I'd gotten a lucky break and broken even, and even advanced.

Quit while you're ahead, right?

That luck from the roulette table followed me, as I wandered in amongst the slots, the bells ringing, the buzzers buzzing, and the music chips playing sound bites, Moon rolling along in those early degrees of Sagittarius, I was still feeling lucky.

by Kramer Wetzel

Game theory is pretty simple, each slot machine is designed to relieve the player of as much available cash as possible while promising a big return for that investment of one penny, two pennies, a nickel, dime, quarter, dollar and so forth. I found one game that seemed promising, just a quarter machine, but I was playing and willing to let it ride for a little while, besides, I'd just seen that one guy clean up at the roulette wheel....

Jackpot. Yes, a big one. One so big that the machine said "IRS Lock-up." Took half an hour to get paid, and I haven't seen that many hundred dollar bills in one place, in my hands, in a long, long, long time. Apparently, I did make a bit of a scene, and I was shaking when I had to sign the IRS form. However, letting them pay most of the win to the government? I don't have to worry about that next April.

I divided the cash up in my mind, tithing, and mentally arranging piles of money, so when I got it, I put some more back into my pocket and with the rest? We played all night long. Which was amusing because I could finally step up to a dollar machine, slip a c-note in, give it a few spins and not worry about losing the money — it was all the casino's money to start with, from that second jackpot.

Plus, I had more luck yet, as long there was a Sagittarius Moon, right? All in all, when we walked out at 11 that night, I'd been there, more or less, for 11 hours, and I was up from what I walked in with by eleven hundred dollars. Just a little over a grand. Worked for me.

"Kramer, you drive, I've been drinking"

Good thing I live like a monk, no? Besides, I seriously doubt that Aries was impaired from a whole two drinks. In 11 hours.

Coming back through Alamogordo, there's a place to turn off to go to the freeway, a longer but more scenic route, or there's the back road, straight into El Paso.

"Should I turn here?" I asked, peering at the signage, seeing a little "El Paso" arrow tacked onto the bottom of one sign.

"No. Yes. NO! YES!"

So I put on the turn signal, and took a right, bypassing the right hand turn lane, but executing a perfectly legal turn. Red lights. Cops. Had my luck just run out?

When the New Mexico Highway Patrolman realized I wasn't drunk, just another misguided Texan, he let us go. Some days, it pays to live like a monk. As I exclaimed, when I motored off, "Our luck has just run out."

I was very careful all the way back to El Paso in the late evening dark.

Originally posted August 24, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Feast Day of St. Giles:

Patron Saint of beggars. Back on topic: let me say this about that:

I frequent a lot of coffee houses, for fun and profit. Tipping is an important part of the culture. The history of coffee and by extension, coffee houses, goes back 500 years or so. At various times in history, especially literary history, coffee houses have served as important gathering places. There are a couple of localized versions wherein alcohol and tobacco is available alongside the coffee — I do enjoy my little pleasures.

When I was broke, really broke, the most I could afford was a shot of espresso, What that did was refine my approach to how I tasted the coffee. Plus I learned a lot more about just how much labor goes into a decent cup of coffee.

From recent caffeine research, I found out that espresso was coffee that was intended as "made expressly for you." But what a number of folks don't get? A single shot of espresso can be a very labor-intensive process.

I've used this in a scope already, but I do figure that it bears repeating, the observation about a number of folks lined up, grumbling, that a simple shot of coffee took so long. That "triple—tall—soya—milk—mocha—white—chocolate (with an extra shot) is a labor of love. It can be slammed together in matter of minutes, but it's not as simple as pouring coffee from an urn. If it's coffee from an urn? Might I recommend the stuff at the convenience store, down the street, no tipping required.

Not that tipping is required in any coffee place, it's just a matter of form. And culture. For the last two weeks, I've been in and out of Caffè Dali (Mesa, Westside El Paso). Monday morning, on the way to the airport, we stopped one last time. I slipped another dollar in the jar for the Capricorn tending the machine. He doesn't know my name, but he does know that I like coffee like women.

"Oh, hot and black?"

"Just bitter."

Actually, he does a very fair approximation of several drinks that I'm fond of. I do prefer my espresso drawn a little slower, but I'm well aware that I'm still training him. Plus he kept trying to sign me up for a "buy ten, get one free" card, even though I don't figure I'll ever see that barista again.

Then, Monday evening, on the way home from the bus stop, after the quick shuttle ride home, a Libra barista poured an excellent double espresso. Yeah, so I tipped her a dollar, too. That works out to more than a 50% tip, but she put up with my meandering ways, the way I gawked at the menu for a moment, and earlier, she had humored me about her sign. Monday night was probably a slow night for her, and that dollar — I'm sure — went to a good purpose.

It's a matter of form. It's matter of having once been a tipped employee, too. Tipping is not required, but sure helps to ease the transaction. Besides, a truly gifted barista can make a difference.

There was a Taurus lad who did absolutely the best espresso ever. Instead of just grinding the beans, he would grind, pack, then grind some more and pack some more, because he maintained that the extra step produced a better brew. I still have a digital image —

by Kramer Wetzel

someplace — of one of his shots of espresso, a work of art.

The folks who work at Buck's all have my admiration and sympathy. It's not like it's a glamorous job. For the record, I tend to prefer the independent coffee houses with their mismatched furniture and sometimes not-so-subtle charm. And usually, at least in Austin, free wireless.

But Starbucks is dependable, and while I don't plan to make any particular Bucks a personal hangout, that doesn't mean I won't tip.

At another place in Austin, I watched while a barista (Scorpio) did the three shots of espresso in the cup, then poured in the frothed milk, stirred it up, then added some other step that either involved more espresso, more frothed milk, or something. I didn't catch it all. But what the result was? An excellent drink, and very worth that extra dollar which I left behind. Same place, different day, a Gemini behind the counter, "double espresso with a dollop of frothed milk? In regular cup?" so nice to be remembered. Nice that, after a dollar tip, once or twice, I do get remembered.

I've found that the current crop of coffee houses is a long way from they used to be. But making a decent espresso-based libation is still labor intensive, and being kind to the counter help, like the gesture of a tip, sure helps smooth the transaction.

Originally posted September 1, 2004

Sustained metaphor

Some months ago, I took a look at an upcoming scope and I hit upon — what I thought — was an ideal sustained metaphor. A theme that could run all the way through the scopes, for a whole 12 signs? I've tried it before, and I do this for my own amusement. Is it going to work? Gets a little repetitive, after a while.

I don't think I pulled this one off, but I did get the column finished in a timely and workmanlike manner. The ultimate test? When it goes live, one day in the future. Either folks will love or they'll hate it. It was an amusing attempt. I thought the idea was brilliant — until I tried.

Unrelated:

I was pulling a four-inch Margarita (chartreuse) curly-tail grub on a 3/8 ounce weedless jighead through the water, more to watch its action than to really catch a fish. In the lake's clear water, I was admiring the way the tail fluttered. A tiny, itty-bitty black bass attacked it. Twice. Violently. As violent as a three-inch fish can — he was so tiny, he couldn't get his large mouth around the tail, much less up to the hook. But he did try! Love that, fish with attitude: "Looks good, I'll eat it. Even if it is bigger than me."

""It's my one night free, Virgo dearest, your call."

I tricked my buddy into calling me back, suggesting, since I hadn't seen her car in Shady Acres for the last few days, maybe she'd been abducted by space aliens. She called right back, assuring me she hadn't been abducted, and she blew off her previous engagement to dine with me. But between the call on her ride home and

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me arriving at the front door of her trailer, there was a little Mercury Mayhem.

"I knew I was getting cocky," she said, "thinking I got out of that Mercury Retrograde with no scratches. But when I went to the mail box today? After work? After I talked to you? Nothing but NSF notices. Then I thought someone hijacked my bank account. After 20 minutes on hold, I got it figured out, the State didn't do my direct deposit."

Curra's for some dinner, just the nicest Sagittarius waitress, sure do love them Sagittarius girls, and a couple of pint-sized "Horni Presidente" margaritas? Did the trick, at least calmed that Virgo down. Tequila, (something) "Presidente" brand Tequila?

"Tequila soothes the chapped mind," I said.

"So I kept assuring the bank rep, the State of Texas hadn't gone out of business, and I hadn't been fired," she said.

Late in the evening, I had to promise to take her boyfriend fishing, while I fished and she chatted with said boyfriend on her phone. She was chatting via the phone, he wasn't like, on the phone. I don't know, he was talking into his phone, I'll assume.

Couple of nibbles on the fishing line, but nothing on the hook. Might've been that one little guy again.

Originally posted September 9, 2004

Some days you're the bug

And some days, you're riding with the *king*. Straight up fact, and I have a witness, I, personally, caught 19 Large Mouth Bass on Saturday. The size ranged from small to medium to large. I suppose, that large might be a relative term, though, as I've caught larger fish right out my back door.

But what great fun it was. I took my buddy's advice, and on one pole, I tied on a tiny Launcher and a little spoon, just like I was told to do. "Yeah, we caught 30 or 40 fish last week, using that." Not that I won't believe everything I hear, but I do know that some folks are given to a tad bit of hyperbole.

We started one place, could see fish but couldn't get their attention, so we moved on over to another spot, and finally, back up in a cove, and I was using that Launcher thing, and I got the first tiny fish of the day. He — or she — can't tell at 3 inches — was as cute as could be. Feisty little thing, fought me all the way in, and something I'd never realized before the juvenile bass have sharper "teeth" than their big brothers and sisters. First blood of the day.

We floated around, and kept getting little hits, but nothing of merit. Caught a total of three in that one spot. Might've been four, but those tiny fish, do they really count? Sure. A Large Mouth Bass is a Large Mouth Bass, even if the littlest one was only about three or four inches long. Still counts. And even the little ones, they still fight. Cute little buggers, too. I tried to kiss the first one. It got so upset, it bit my thumb and tried to wriggle away. Kids, huh?

by Kramer Wetzel

I'd worried a little about the impact of Hurricane Ivan on local weather patterns, and I'd expressed concern about rain, but I'd also hoped that the rain wouldn't move in until it was scheduled to do so, in the afternoon.

We were on the lake before sunup, but we didn't hit that sweet spot along the dam until almost ten so it was more like one when we finally rolled back towards town. About the same time the rain was beginning, in earnest. Or the drizzle. We did pull on rain suits, but no sooner do we don rain suits than the rain stops.

That was about the time I pulled in the biggest catch of the day, that medium-sized one. Not really a huge fish, but on light tackle? And compared to the tiny and small fish before it? About right. For that lake, actually, it was a pretty decent fish.

Here's its story, see, throwing downwind, I could get a good cast on, sail that tiny lure through the air. Reeling it back in, I felt another little tickle, but as soon as I tried to reel faster, the first little one shook the hook. I kept cranking, though, figuring it was time to throw again, and that big one hit. Big fish. Lots of fight. Back swimming again, wondering what happened.

"I sure am glad you not into Chinese," my partner explained, as we headed towards BBQ.

"But I am, I mean, I like it fine — sometimes," I replied.

"Yeah, but today? What would you rather have?"

Delicious, properly slow-smoked pork ribs and brisket.

Reminds me of speech by Ulysses in Shakespeare's *Troilus & Cressida*, something about how there is order and place with the planets, that this is reflected on

earth, and how there is a time and place for everything.
(Act I, scene iii)

19 fish. Day—hum. That was some fun. My "bassin' thumb," left hand, is all tore up from the puncture of tiny, needle—like fish teeth. In fact, I think even the smallest fish of the day? Its large mouth could easily fit around my thumb.

Originally posted September 26, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

That's just a little offensive

I'm wondering, "Is it me? Or does this kind of comment offend anyone else?"

I picked up a voice mail, "Hey, I really need a reading right now, but I can't pay you until the middle of next month. But I need help now."

Since I couldn't respond in a polite, tactful manner, I put off making any kind of response. I was sorely tempted to reply to the call, "You go into a grocery store and say, 'I need food now, but I can't pay you until next week?'"

Since I didn't find my answer particularly useful, other than to amuse me, I decided not to respond at that time.

I was in the Hideout Monday afternoon, and the owner was making coffee. Leo. Passable espresso, but I've had better. There, even. All I could remember was the guy's sign, and this week's scope, which suggests that good things are afoot for Leo. Which I commented on, in a bright and cheery manner. In fact, I'd just come in from the post office, and after buying stamps at the machine, I had a pocket full of dollar coins. I flipped one up, "Call it." "Tails," he said. It was tails. I tossed it in the, presumably his, tip jar. "Call it," I said again, "Tails," he called it. Came up tails, I tossed it in the tip jar. I fished around in my pocket for some more change, dollar coins, and made idle conversation about how Leo is looking up these days. (Jupiter in Libra, in case you're wondering.)

I'm a regular customer. Over the years, I've invested a lot of dollars, some of them hard-earned, in coffee at

that one place. The wireless is a little flaky, but I've seen a good show there.

During Monday afternoon's interlude with the Leo, he handed me my preferred (this week) libation, a double shot of espresso with a tiny amount of frothed milk foam, the drink usually costs about two bucks. When I fished out another couple of dollar coins, he declined, saying the coffee was courtesy of him.

I'd look at it as a "frequent flyer" discount, or as a tip for being nice to a Leo, or any number of customer service related issues and perks.

But the point being, I was fully prepared to pay for that coffee. Expecting to. I don't think he'd like it if I came in, and promised to pay, oh, like the middle of next month, maybe, when I'm expecting some money, instead of at the point-of-sale.

Or am I being unreasonable?

Originally posted September 28, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Two-meat platter

So it's kind of difficult to drag a "dyed in the wool" Democrat Vegetarian (Aquarius) to a BBQ place for a meal. However, in keeping with Tuesday's tradition, I'm thinking the title remains the same.

Tofu pork ribs:

I liked the comment about "pretend objectivity" — there's passage in the introduction to my romance book that deals with my objectivity — or lack thereof. Instead of pretending to be objective, I pretend to be completely subjective; therefore, when some decent objectivity creeps into my work, it's like a little bonus. No harm, no foul.

When the Muse is with me, when I'm in the zone, then I'm not thinking about marketing-speak, or the latest trends in advertising copy. I'm worrying my way through what a certain planet is doing to a particular sign. Very simple. Plus, I tend divorce myself from reality for the duration of the writing session. Some folks would wonder if I was ever really married to reality, but that's different question, not germane to this point.

Reality can be so tedious. As far as I can tell, and this is just a personal concept, but journalism, good journalism, is packed with the writer's experience. Instead of just reporting the facts, the experience as a whole is covered. Style, wit, plus, there's always the observations that the writer chooses to record. Objective? My lily-white backside.

Textured vegetable protein chopped brisket (with Rudy's sauce):

(Rudy's BBQ may be a chain, but the sauce is still some of the best.)

We stopped off at Vivo's for dinner, a new spot to me, as I've pretty much avoid that end of town for a while. Good food. Excellent food. Perhaps the hot sauce alone was worth the trip, even if it was just a tad bit too salty. It did have that unique flavor that comes from, I believe, cumin.

Then it was movie time. Screen Door at Arts on Real. The first short film was, perhaps the most poignant, it was a Brazilian film about childhood. The juxtaposition of rich white girls with ballet classes, and tap classes, and talking about swimming and gymnastics versus the boys, about the same age, talking about work. Footage of boys at work, or playing soccer in the dust versus the girls at class, or strolling in the garden.

It was billed as a documentary, but the power was the message — and the way it was delivered. Pretty strong short work, but objective? Brown boys and white girls?

In bleak way, I was commenting on the gender differences whereas my Aquarius friend was commenting on the color differences, I never noticed the difference in hue, and she never noticed the gender point. Combine them together? Just what was the message?

A very powerful short film.

In some of the animation, too, there was another point, as the film cycled through the march of Western Civilization, but it didn't stop where I'm accustomed to the stop. It went, in a few short frames, from Copernicus through the Renaissance, to Shakespeare, to Columbus, and then onto the guy who discovered Brazil. I always thought finding America was the end of the

by Kramer Wetzel

line. I suppose, then, I'm not objective. But I never claimed to be.

Originally posted September 29, 2004

Two-meat platter

Pork ribs, brisket & another Leo story.

Pork Ribs:

I know I've noted this before, and I don't even recall where the material exists. I suspect it's on the site some place, but I'm too lazy to dig out the material. I was just a fresh face on the local circuit, and we were working in San Angelo.

Must've been ten years ago. It was, at best, an event that bombed, but that was because there was too much going on that weekend. Or something. We were in a — I'm guessing here — a Howard Johnson motel. Here's the parts that I remember, and how I remember them.

The hotel, or motel, it's part of a chain, or was, at one time, a part of a chain, that stretched to include Amarillo, Lubbock, Midland/Odessa, and, at one time, San Angelo. If the town of San Angelo doesn't sound familiar, consider that it's the hometown to *Los Lonely Boys*, yeah, that band.

What was memorable was the architecture of the hotel. All of the locations listed have hotels of the same vintage, same basic design, a large "atrium" if it can be called that, with a pool and miniature golf course (clubs are available at the front desk, for hotel guests only), and, in the case of the San Angelo one, the motel's convention ballroom was located just off the atrium. There was an upstairs restaurant of sorts, not exactly high-brow dining at the time, as that particular motel had fallen into the "weekly rates available" kind of use.

by Kramer Wetzel

Its architectural kin, in Midland, for example, is well-maintained and quite the flagship. Last time I was in that one, in Midland, it was a Holiday Inn. But that decade back? In San Angelo? That place was pretty run-down. Almost seedy.

So Sunday morning, we'd congregated in the upstairs restaurant, for bacon and eggs, and me, being the kind of guy I was at the time, I'd picked up a *Dallas Morning News* paper, the big, fat "bulldog" edition, the early Sunday paper. I sat the table with my working companions, most of whom I didn't really know too well, and I proceeded to open up the paper. I sorted through the ad circulars, tossed the classified sections, and started to read the comics.

Across from me, at the table, was Elaine (a Leo). (She will rue this part of the story, but it's all true.) I was about halfway through digesting the first comic I was reading, when a hand reaches across table, and parts the paper in my hand. I was then looking at Elaine.

She said one word, an emphatic, "No."

So that's where we met. Seems as how, in subsequent years, as the story gets told and retold, that I triggered a response based on her interaction — or lack of interaction — with a certain ex-husband. Something about reading the paper at the breakfast table. So I don't read a newspaper at a breakfast table with her anymore. At all. Just that simple. And I chuckle about it, but she's vaguely embarrassed. One should never trifle with a Leo.

Probably less than a year later, Elaine pulled together an event on one of the first "gambling boats" on the Texas coast. It was, as I recall, out of Galveston, and it was a pretty rudimentary affair. The bulk of the patrons were interested in gaming, most assuredly not interested in

readings, but we all did wind up doing quite a brisk business with the boat's employees, I suppose, they should've been termed "crew." It wasn't much of a ride on that boat. During a break, Elaine took me down, and she showed me how to select and play a slot machine. I wound up with a small jackpot of maybe \$20. But after the other fees for the weekend? That small win was pretty much my profit for that trip.

Brisket:

I worked and fished, all yesterday morning. I was surprised, as I was trying to use a crappie pole with a really light lure on the end, and I did manage three bites. Solid bites. But that Uncle Buck's Crappie Pole isn't stout enough for Large Mouth Bass hook-set. One was funny, to me, I yanked back on the pole, and the little fish went flying through the air.

The fish held the lure in his mouth for the duration of the ride, but when I reeled the lure — sans fish — back in, the weed guard hadn't even snapped open. Which meant, for his ride that fish was just hanging on to the bait. Which got me thinking, see, I'm wondering — fish don't have arms — so taking a ride on one of my lures? Isn't that like water skiing for a fish?

Imagine, one bass to another, "Dude! Just bite it! It's a rush!"

Originally posted October 13, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Reflections in the water's surface

It's sort of like looking at a very still body of water, and seeing yourself, or, at least, seeing reflections of your self, mirrored back. Sometimes, it's just a silhouette.

In the last couple of days, one afternoon, between horoscopes and readings, I was standing at the edge of the river, on the Shady Acre's little dock. I had on my usual, these days, black cargo shorts, a phone in one pocket, digital camera, and not much else.

Fishing pole in hand, looking through polarized sunglasses, I was stalking the mighty "trash mouth" bass. Me and the fish, that afternoon, we weren't seeing eye—to—eye. So I was standing, peering, casting, observing, and just generally being myself. Wearing shorts, not much else. Isn't that what everyone wears on a fall afternoon, between writing and reading?

Neighbor passes along the footpath, waves a hello, and I glance up, and I can't help but notice a stunning female companion. I go back to fishing.

"Hi Kramer, I know you, you did a reading for me, at New Age Books, some years ago," says the stunning companion. She said her name.

"Leo, right?" Then I suggested a year or two for her birth year. Kind of like a car model, you know? Or maybe a wine. Chateau Leo.

"No, it was like, in '96 or so," she replied, mistaking my guess, which was accurate, "and you said I was hell on relationships. Which was true. Look: you're fishing. You were that fishing something."

They were busy with other things, so I went on back to fishing. Interesting the comments I make that folks remember. Interesting, too, the tiny parts of her chart that I can remember. Like sign. She ran some kind of an astrology-based business for a few years, I think. I don't know, for sure. She didn't care to elaborate, but I took it that it was in her past.

I like writing, as I get to start in one direction and meander off in another, completely out-of-control. That one Leo — remember I only saw her from a distance — all I saw was a shapely figure and a Leo mane of blond hair — reminded me of an interview with another Austin astrologer.

The basic question was how much money could a consulting astrologer make? Not a lot. But that's why there are several revenue streams. Advertising, pretty bleak, but worth a few cents, subscriptions — good enough for proof-of-concept, and books, plus personal consultations, travel shows, and website sales, still, it's not a lot, but then, I have a fairly meager existence — and I like it that way. Why I live like a monk, don't-you-know.

The consistency seems to pay off, that's for sure.

The final reflection was a reading the other evening. Got off to a rather late start, but the longer I interacted with this client, the weirder it got for me. Born the same year, with certain "astrology signatures" which are very familiar. Almost too familiar. While the details varied greatly, the timing was so similar, the same issues, similar problems, and in some cases, similar solutions. Then the person folded one long leg under, while sitting. Like I do, frequently. That spooked me.

by Kramer Wetzel

It was like looking at an image of myself. In the wan light of the bar's patio, as the evening cooled off, I had to wonder how I appeared, and now I know. At least, I have a better clue.

Originally posted October 14, 2004

Recent news

I picked something up via Dave Barry's web log, which then linked to an article about how Mr. Barry will be taking some time off from writing a regular column.

I can't link — can't find it — to the article I read, what, 24 hours ago? Why this was so intensely interesting to me, in the article, from what I recall, Dave Barry was discussing the idea of not writing a weekly column after doing so for 30 years.

For the astrologically inclined, it coincides with a Saturn phenomena, and for the less astrologically inclined, think about it thusly, he's been doing this — weekly — for over three decades. Any odds on stopping cold turkey?

I've tried, on numerous occasions, to stop writing. At this point, I'm just a little over a decade into this game, so it's not too big of a deal. But I can't seem to stop. Wouldn't think of it.

Unrelated happiness:

Reading — downtown — then some miles on the trail, which lead me to the record store — wait — why do I call it record store? I don't think there's any vinyl there. Picked up that new Fat Boy Slim (Norman Cook) CD. "and the sign said long haired freaky people need not apply" (oh yeah, where's that sample from?)

I was going someplace with the whole happiness thing, and what happened, I get a call, "Hey, get that cranky old lady to chain up her dog, I just washed the wheels on the truck," and that meant a quick dinner at Threadgill's, and tossing a lure in the lake, and then,

by Kramer Wetzel

two more calls, more website development. Was just a busy as could be day.

Round a—bout, 10/21/04 3:04 PM, ya'll said:

- > The second surprise was having an actual
- > contemporary read my chart! I wasn't
- > just getting a lecture, I was getting a genuine,
- > "I've been there!!!" type of reading
- > — as if someone really was understanding my
- > life, because they had
- > lived it and not just because they were
- > skilled at reading a chart. (which
- > you were that too).

There was another comment that came up from another web guy, during the afternoon, someplace between the second and third cup of coffee.

"How often do you update?"

Once a week, journal is daily.

"That's a lot of material, each week."

3K words for the column, plus links. Journal? Averages 10K/month. Thanks for noticing.

Originally posted October 22, 2004

Two-meat platter: live bait and brisket

"You wear boots?"

It was a late night question, as I left the BBQ place, me gripping a carton of brisket in one hand and to-go box of brisket (for the cat) in the other hand.

I waved my arms around.

"Boots or sandals, all I've got, you've seen me in winter wear before?"

Apparently not.

The so-called "Fall Season" has been balmy, to say the very least. Tuesday afternoon, it rained. Then the sun popped back out, and it looked like there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

Sitting on the patio, it started to rain a bit and we moved under the shelter of the patio's cover. Back against the wall, a silent stage at one end, it was story time. Something about growing up in Texas, something about the way a place infects the soul.

"I just can't live anywhere else," my buddy was explaining.

The moon was a few degrees away from being full, as I swinging along the trail on the way home. The recent rain left the grass damp, the full moon combined with Austin's Moon Light Towers cast an eerie glow to the landscape, the water ruffled by the almost standard breeze out of the southeast. I peeled out of my shirt and wrapped it around the bait and brisket.

by Kramer Wetzel

I first saw this sig file from an Aquarius from Ft. Worth. Might not be original, but that's the first I saw of it, "Where are we going and what am I doing on hand basket?"

For one, shining moment, someplace on the trail last night, I was so far removed from the problems of the world. Gentle camaraderie, a perky Leo server, decent smoked platter full of tasty bits, life was all right.

Matter of perspective.

Might've been that last cup of coffee, too, just up the hill at Bouldin. I requested a little double shot of espresso. I think I got about four shots.

Or it could've been the way the Leo served the dessert, heaped with ice cream. Not that I should, but I did do an extra turn on the trail, on the way home.

Originally posted October 27, 2004

View from the edge

Two divergent tracks:

Happened the other evening, and it happened again last night. One side of my head was running through the lyrics from Cory Morrow, basically a Texas country tune. Plenty of twang, steel guitar, that sort of noise. The other side was listening to some "disco—techno—dance—mix." In the center? I couldn't make any reasonable, or even an unreasonable, connection between the two concurrent tracks.

Late night business:

It's the third night this week, me in shorts and the same shirt, up late, drinking coffee, and enjoying merry banter in the late evening. Here it is, almost October, and I'm still in shorts and sandals, carrying on like it was a summer's eve.

Heading home, I was watching the moon, just past the point of being at its fullest, by a few degrees, either astronomical or astrological, and I was watching the thin clouds add a fine layer of texture to the bright light. Almost daylight. Twilight, anyway.

Unrelated fishing tale:

Neighbor walks a dog by while I was fishing, "Hey Kramer, what are doing?"

"Feeding the little fish."

"Huh?"

by Kramer Wetzel

"Yeah, big ole night crawler, on the end of the line? Little perch just nibble until it's all gone. So I'm really just feeding the fish."

Some days, the fish win.

Originally posted October 28, 2004

Airports

And family with airports.

In the event it was missed, completely unrelated to anything, the pay-per-view page contains less than 2% advertising. Low-fat web page?

Perfect.

Travel notes:

Subtitle: Excellence in customer service.

Marty called me, about a week ago. Marty is a Pisces, as it turns out, and she was running the baggage claim customer service desk, which is a lot more like a closet than a desk, and she was just alerting me to the fact that she'd found my pager. Or that the pager had been turned in. As it had escaped my luggage, somehow.

First time she called, with that cheery Pisces voice, I reminded her it was early on a Sunday morning, and I probably wouldn't remember talking to her.

She called again Saturday morning, just to remind me that she still had my pager. I was a little more awake, I thanked her and told her I'd be right out to pick it up.

When I gathered up the pager, I thanked her for her persistence, charm, wit and most of all, patience. It was one of those lessons in customer service.

There's much, I see, that I've left out. Getting to the airport, what a lovely red-head looks like, all the details, save for the fact that the pager was still there. Oh never mind, it was just customer relations.

by Kramer Wetzel

Brush with fame

Senator Kay Hutchison (R — TX) (I think) — was on the flight. There was a little, quiet campaigning going on, amongst a very Republican looking set of housewives, but as I wasn't approached, I was busy on a phone call, doling out astrology advice to another devout Republican, and I failed to mention the Senator. Or some of her uncharacteristic bad calls on local issues that affect me.

Won't be voting for her, that's for sure.

Shopping (like there's anything else to do in Dallas?) Andrew (Gemini) and then Whitney (Aquarius) tackled and fielded questions, both astute and inane, from me and Sister, while at the Apple store. We walked out — just like my predictions — with a handful of goodies — allegedly for Pa Wetzel, but then I wonder...

Family stories:

"Yes, I know you don't believe it, but I'm on a low-stress, no-fat, vegetarian diet," Sister said, while helping herself to the second end-cut of roast. Which was followed by two kinds of cake and two kinds of ice cream, as she agitated about politics. Three for three?

I'd picked up a wide-screen, digital alarm clock for Pa Wetzel, as a birthday gift, and as I pointed out, after I plugged it in, and set it up, he was leaving me with a bad image — he was starting to glance at the instructions.

Ma Wetzel, nominally, it was her birthday party, was wandering around the house, Saturday afternoon advancing all the clocks.

"So what time is it now," Sister asked, mock sarcasm in her voice.

Ma Wetzel glanced up, "First you add an hour then subtract two...."

The fact that my sister and myself turned out so normal? It's amazing. Just amazing.

Originally posted October 31, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Three-way Thursday

I got off on a political, navel-gazing, almost pointless tirade and halfway through it, I found myself writing down a note to remember to erase the whole mess. Glad I did. I still have it on the computer, someplace, but I'm not interested in debate, I'm interested in making money these days. Moon's moved out of Cancer, away from the point where a reckoning has occurred, and we've all cast our lots, for good or for ill. No point in rehashing what's happened.

I took a friend to the airport so she could go off and watch NASCAR races. Cool. Since I like to reduce vehicular traffic as much as possible, I swung by the grocery warehouse on the way home from the airport, got stuck in traffic, and remembered why I spend more time walking because I was probably moving faster, if I was on foot.

I think I was busy until almost ten, and then I stepped out for the evening. I was headed towards the Alamo downtown, via the post office, so, in reality, I was still tending to business, as I had one more package to mail. I had a few minutes to kill, so I stopped for a little espresso, and the Capricorn behind the counter noted that I usually had my hair in a ponytail. It's been cool enough to let it down, these days.

The movie was late getting started; the Alamo was booked for some event. So I asked the ticket taker if he had a cigarette. He paused then jumped up to fetch his coat. He (Gemini) offered me a package of Bugler. I demurred so he rolled me up a smoke. I wandered out into the cold night, puffing away. Eventually, I found

myself at Little City, fetching another espresso. "So what's your birthday?"

"Are you Kramer? I think you did my chart — about five years ago."

Aquarius. You'd think I'd remember, and I was surprised I didn't.

"I've changed. A lot."

Must be it.

I was going to mention the homeless person asleep in a doorway, under a commercial "space for lease" sign. And a late night skateboard guy, checking his cell phone as he coasted down the hill.

And I coasted back into the Alamo, to see a film, a film written by Quentin Tarantino, True Romance. I've seen it before, and I thought it was part of the "bad films at midnight on Wednesday for free" series — I couldn't recall much of the film, other than I thought it was good the first time I saw it. On the big screen? Even better. Way funny. Over—the—top. Stellar, and I mean, stellar cast. I hadn't realized so many stars were in the film.

It was cold out, walking home. The little stars overhead, remarkably easy to pick out the winter constellations, twinkling in the night's air.

Originally posted November 5, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

alt-country

(which should have a subtitle of WTF) (and if you don't like an occasional steel guitar, fiddle and so forth skip this one) (and no more parenthetical comments, neither)

It's started with a post found at Scott's (www.TheFatGuy.com) place. I just got done writing up a half-dozen eBay paragraphs, and I was just nosing around the web.

I've got a new "mini iPod" on order, hopefully, with next day air, it should be here before the weekend. I was pulling together a good play list, so some of that music was still stuck in my head.

I can't do a top 20 of alt-country music. I'm not well-versed in the genre. But I can add a few notes about Texas artists.

Like Lyle Lovett (Scorpio) or Robert Earl Keen (Capricorn). Hank III (Sagittarius), Dale Watson (Libra), Kevin Fowler (Taurus), and Wayne Hancock (Taurus).

I've written about it before, but the first time I saw Hank III, the first set he did was raw, down-home, crying-in-your-beer, rip-your-heart-out, lonesome, wailing, country music. With an edge. Which, when he swung into his "second set," it all made perfect sense. At that time, I sort of figured that second set as punk. Only, it was punk played with a demon fiddle, and pedal steel guitar, and a stand-up bass. Oh yeah. Take that, Nashville. Or, as the song goes, "Trashville."

And that's what alt-country is really about. It's that other side.

A couple of weeks ago, I was drinking coffee drinks and soaking up a vegetarian meal at a local, rather bohemian, place. The music tends to be pretty diverse. Dead Kennedys, and music of a similar ilk is often on the sound system. What would I expect from a younger, 20 — something crowd? But then, a little later, there was some Johnny Cash. I asked, like I often do, what the connection was.

The little Libra explained it, "Like, you know, it's real."

I don't find Johnny Cash in the alt-country group, but I do know his canon of work is widely respected. Thanks to a little Gemini girl, I added Gram Parsons — perhaps the original cosmic cowboy, to the list of frequently listened to music. Plus I'd recommend it, as well. One or two of his tunes always wind up on my play lists these days.

Put REK's first two live albums on the list. *Live #2* and *Live from the Sons of Herman Hall* (in Dallas, no less). Excellent works.

I've found that Steve Fromholz's *Texas Trilogy*, especially as rendered by the soulful Lyle Lovett has to be on the play list, over and over. That goes back to train ride, one summer, not long ago, coming back down the silver rails from Dallas, winding through Bosque County. Eerie, as the train passed through a town mentioned in the song. The train doesn't stop there, anymore. That's from *Step Inside This House*.

Michael Murphey and Charlie Daniels aren't rebels anymore, but their legacy and their earlier works still stand out.

by Kramer Wetzel

The unverified rumor I heard, Kevin Fowler was offered a suitcase full of money for one of his songs, "Beer bait & Ammo," if he would just agree to change the lyrics. He didn't. Last time I saw him perform, he had the right rebel attitude, plus his music is straight out Texas country.

The one time — so far — that I've seen Wayne Hancock play, he was dressed in a Hawaiian shirt, jeans and sneakers. Not exactly a country a look, but it fits in Austin just fine. Plus he performs. I got a sense that he was giving it all back to the audience, and at one point, I was pretty sure he was signing just to me.

I was conversing with a darling little Leo the other afternoon. On the patio, pieces of pork stuck between my teeth, chatting about life, love, and Texas French Bread tuna sandwiches. I think that Gen X echoed what's so good about the alt-country that's hot.

"Oh, I like the hippies' way of thinking, but I like to eat meat."

(Musical accompaniment? The Chemical Brothers and especially Norman Cook.)

Originally posted November 10, 2004

Two-meat Tuesday:

Because I knew I had to start early, I passed out early, and slept the sleep of an angel. One of the advantages to living like a monk these days.

I popped out of bed, reheated day-old coffee, and got a start. I was ready for that 6 in the unholy hour of the AM honk outside the trailer, and I was off. I packed a bag, thinking I'd have to sit in the doctor's office or something.

"No, just take my car and come back and get me around noon."

Good enough.

I should go in the hilarity of picking up a friend fresh out from anesthesia, but suffice it to say, my little red-headed friend was toasted. A kindly nurse rolled my buddy out in wheelchair, and from there, it was a lot of talk, about this, that and the other. She was pretty buzzed. I parked her at her place, and I sat down at her computer, trying to figure out the wiring on her two-computer-and-cable-modem-soon-to-be-wireless home network. Several hours later, as she dozed in the easy chair, I got more and more frustrated, to the point that I gave up. She woke up, told me that she 1) didn't know the password or account name and 2) she powered it all off to switch the connections around — every time.

I walked home, stopping off just to buy a little bait and pick through half of the two-meat platter. I got home, and all I could think about, besides getting some of the

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tender brisket to the cat, was getting a fat nightcrawler on a hook, and feeding the fishes.

Ma Wetzel called, and I took the call via the cell phone's "speaker phone" feature — while I was fishing. A Virgo neighbor, a Leo, and a Sagittarius were walking their dogs, and while I was speaking to Ma Wetzel, the neighbors all hollered in unison, "Hi Mom!" Cute.

Then another Virgo neighbor calls, stops by the waterfront to see me while I was fishing, and somehow, we ended up at Curra's for dinner.

"Tequila, Conchita Pibil, and raw fish, there's just something right about it all."

I was playing my game, "What's my sign," with the Aquarius server. Pretty much my standard good cheer, no matter what the sign, and she was in a good mood — we were on the patio. Along about the third cocktail for my Virgo friend, I was drinking decaf coffee, that Virgo has to launch into the "Kramer did a reading for me once and it was so accurate," as the story involves a certain (now ex) boyfriend.

A few minutes later, the other server wanders over, a lovely Libra lass, "Whatever he says? It's right. So right! Remember those coins you gave me?"

No, actually, I don't remember the coins I gave her.

"I held onto them for two and half months, and my luck has been better ever sense."

So, a couple of months ago, right before Jupiter went crashing into Libra, I'd added three one-dollar coins to the tip for that Libra, and I'd suggested that dollar coins are imbued with a certain kind of good luck. Which they are, but never mind that now. As an astrologer, I knew

from her birthday, that she was about to enter a period of extreme good fortune, due to the planet's movement. I don't recall it, but I'm sure I suggested she just needed to wait until her birthday arrived. That's merely planetary timing, nothing magic.

"I had the best birthday I've ever had! Thanks! Listen to whatever he says!"

I was blushing, but no one could tell, it was dark on the patio.

Originally posted November 10, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Friend of the devil?

(Grateful Dead version)

"If I get home before daylight, I just might get some sleep tonight."

For some reason, perhaps it touches me? I like that one lyric. Couple of more licks came up on the drive, too:

"When the sun comes up on a sleepy little town, down around San Antone...."

China Grove? Uno: folks in San Antonio rather dislike the name "San Antone." Dos: San Antonio is the subject of a lot of songs.

Saw this one, then couldn't get a decent picture, one of those RV type of truck/mobile home deals, with two surfboards tied on the back. I wonder where they were going?

A little later:

"Oh no Kramer, I've heard about you. Mac's told me stories."

(Mac, the other aura camera dude.)

Even later:

Stopped off in San Marcos, on the way home. The Coffee Pot. Free wireless, coffee. A smoking section. Civilization.

I'd called Bubba Sean as I was leaving SA, northbound on the Interstate, and I asked him what he and the little

woman were up to, like, "Dude, meet me for pizza in San Marcos."

He calls, as I'm almost getting into San Marcos, and suggests a different venue because he can't abide tomato, bacon and ranch dressing pizza (a San Marcos/Valentino's staple — very worth the trip). So while I was soaking up some bandwidth, waiting on Bubba and the little woman, I actually dealt with one problem, and I looked up from my coffee long enough to notice a young man with, basically, well, to me, it looked like he had a green Mohawk. Yeah. Perfectly normal.

A little later, over ribs, fish & chips, I noted that there were two young men walking out of the same bar, dressed in woodland camo outfits.

I pointed them out, Sean looks over his shoulder, and I asked, "Deer Season?"

"Yeah, deer season or members of a militia," he dryly observed then gave a little shrug, balancing his empty palms.

Saturday night in Central Texas.

Or, as Bubba Sean is fond of saying, "Welcome to my world."

Pat Green, Cory Morrow, doing Waylon Jennings:

"The same old tune, fiddle and guitar where do we take from here?"

Or, my favorite bit, in spirit, anyway:

"Ten years on the road, making one night stands, speeding my young life away, tell me one more time, just so I'll understand, you sure Hank did it this way?"

by Kramer Wetzel

"I've seen the world with a five piece band looking at the backside of me...."

No rhinestone boots and big fancy cars. But that road does go on, like, forever.

Originally posted November 15, 2004

The flip side of the coin?

I rather enjoy working on the radio, even if it is in the far Midwest, or wherever Indiana is. I haven't a clue. Eastern Time Zone on the charts, all I need to know. I think it's cold there, in that Eastern Time Zone. If I recall, from my geography, Indiana is next to Canada, like Maine and Washington State. And Canada is this three-mile-wide stretch that ends at the Arctic Circle. And from the Arctic Circle, it's about two miles to the North Pole.

What really does inconvenience me, though, is the fact that I'm missing the usual Monday night fare at the Alamo (Draft House) downtown. However, the radio program does provide two things: traffic and customers, and I suppose, if I have to miss a little fun, that's just the way it is. Monday nights, on the radio. Kind of like an answer to Monday Night Football.

Business & Motivation:

I don't even remember how this started, although, I'm sure I cataloged my experience some place. Yesterday morning, I clicked through on a comic strip I read online and I had *dejá-vu* experience. Perhaps it was the pre-dawn, pre-coffee buzz. Or lack of buzz. Maybe the neurons weren't firing in sequence. A little later, I realized that I'd read that strip, last week, in a newspaper.

Hint: that's the way the strip's creator, the author, manages it. It's a good idea, too. Since newsprint, that almost dead medium, is the primary source of income, the website shows material that's one week old. Sound familiar?

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Two-meat Tuesday's special

1. Hot dog in the afternoon.

Apparently, there's an ad running — I wouldn't know — I don't own a TV — that shows a convenience store opening in the morning, and the hot dogs have been on the grill since the night before. That's TV, the land of make-believe. But I did select just such a hot dog for a morning nosh while on dash to hit the postal box. At least it looked like it had been there for days — well done. The hot dog was well-done, not the PO Box.

2. BBQ at night.

I do like some foods well-cooked, like that hot dog. Two-meat platter, a little late in the evening. I was with one client, and I ran into another client, both paid up for readings. That's nice, walked out with more money than I walked in with.

But better than cash, to me, was the line scrawled across the top of the to-go box full of leftover brisket. A snippet from the dinner conversation.

"Not monogamous, not committed, not a relationship," which was what a male was saying to a female, but what that female was hearing? Like ever other word?

"Monogamous. Committed. A relationship." And her counter to his comment?

"Oh! We're engaged now!"

Originally posted November 17, 2004

The Libra scope

I was reminded about this little tale, and I was going to work it into the scopes, but then, I thought about it, and I figure it would severely irritate some folks, so I'll just tag the few extra lines here. Statute of limitations is up on this one, I think.

I dated this girl one time, one of the reasons I live like a monk, and she was "spirited." Perhaps it had something to do with upbringing or issues, or that astrology part of her chart. I'm not sure. Well, I am sure, but I'm not going to say. For the record, I do know the warning signs, and I chose, at that time, to ignore my own, good advice — which was to leave her alone.

So what happened, once upon a time, we had a quarrel. About something I did? No, about something I didn't do, but never let the facts interfere with a woman's ire and scorn. I just kept making matters worse by refusing to engage in the good fight. Eventually, she popped me one. It was a glancing blow, and I just gathered myself up and left the premises. I do believe that a piece of furniture, or hardware, followed me out. She was, at least at that time, what us guys call a "thrower." In fact, she used to shop Salvation Army and Goodwill for ammunition — normally, plates and flatware.

So that was like, on a Thursday night. Like last weekend, and the weekend before that, and the weekend before that, I was on the road, and out of town for work. Since I left in huff, she wasn't about to pick me up the airport on my return.

I didn't see her again until about Tuesday or Wednesday, almost week after I got pummeled. Her right arm was in

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a sling. We forgave and forgot, at least I did, and she showed up for dinner, after the next local event, with her arm still in a sling. She'd cracked a bone in her hand, from impact with a rock-hard object (my skull). I wasn't even bruised.

In hindsight, the least I could've done was limp, or bruise myself so that there was some kind of show — matching injuries, hers and his?

So it was at dinner, a Saturday night, and we're all sitting around in a TexMex joint, me and a half-dozen of my psychic friends. One the ladies looked up at my girlfriend, and asks what happened.

"I ran into a door." Which, the way I wanted to remember what the girlfriend said? "*He* ran into a door."

"Look honey," that matronly friend suggested, "next time you hit him, aim for a soft spot, not his head."

I got one of those looks, the kind that could kill, as the temperature plummeted in the dining area, an icy blast hissed at me, "You told her?"

Before I could refute anything, the matronly psychic spoke up, "First off, you're at a table of psychics, no secrets here. And he didn't say a thing. Not a word. But it's also logical, see, your hand is broken, and there's not a scratch on him. Aim for the soft parts next time, dear, not his head."

True story.

Originally posted November 18, 2004

Fright

(attributed to Mercury's retrograde position)

Since I'm aware that the planets are moving in a way that's not conducive to my normal work, like anything I do is normal, I was working on hammering out the framework for next year. What's really scary?

52 weeks. 52 blank page holders. 52 links with no content. 52 empty spaces. 52 empty shell casing that need to be filled with useful, valuable horoscopes. A whole year, in a framework, all done. Now, if I can just add content.

I looked out the trailer's window, and I could see small fish breaking the still surface of the creek's backwater eddy. I clicked through to the weather page. Austin's temp was 30 degrees.

52 blank pages. Mercury in apparent retrograde motion — in Sagittarius. 52 weekly spots that need to be filled. Fish, breaking the surface, and I've still got a couple of nightcrawlers, wiggling in the icebox. Usually good for, at the very least, feeding the fish.

My normal reaction to pressure? Go fish. Yessir, 52 blank spots that need content. Too bad it was too cold when the fish were stirring the top of the lake.

Originally posted December 2, 2004

by Kramer Wetzel

Coffee shop metaphor

I've used it before, and it looks like I'll have to use it again. I was tending to the garden, rather, I was twiddling the bits that comprise the backend of the website, and I got to thinking about streamlining, and general housecleaning.

I've got three URLs that point here, at this point. The obvious one? astrofish dot net, the original. The second? astrofish dot org, and finally, one I added a few months back? LowBrowMystic dot com. The first two are obvious, the last one is an old moniker from a Gemini & Virgo, a name someone took for a while, but then didn't use. I just bought it up on sale, and I have it point here.

So pursuant to the idea of reviewing everyone's Egg Nog (something) coffee drink, I got off wondering about how my horoscopes fit with the rest of what's out there.

It's simple. The places I prefer, like Jo's, Bouldin Creek, Halcyon, Little City, and the Hideout? Those places all qualify as "funky." A bit off—beat. One step different from mainstream.

Places like Halcyon have cleaned themselves up a little too much, but the coffee's agreeable, and it's a prime location for me, being just a block out of the way coming or going to the post office. Bouldin is preferable these days, but my tastes will vary. Plus I try to suit a spot to any clients I might be meeting. Places like Bouldin are sometimes a little too funkified for the more refined and elegant clients.

"I can't just stop off at your house?"

It's a trailer. It's 300 square feet. No, you can't. There's always that problem with stalkers, too. Don't laugh, it's happened before — "But you're a guy; guys don't have stalkers."

Oh, that's right, just groupies.

In case the message has been missed, I live like a monk. Solitary. Well, I do have a rather large and aging "old lady" cat, but I'm not sure she counts. On cold nights? She's like an electric heating pad. That purrs. And needs her litter box cleaned.

Which reminds me, it's like a coffee shop. A little coffee shop. The furniture doesn't always match. Sometimes the metaphors are strained. Sometimes, too, the help is a little surly.

"Surly to bed, surly to rise, I always say."

There are very few places that I go that I'm not known. I was relating tale about what happened the other evening, to my folks, when they were in town. A girl (some woman, actually) was fixing a shot of espresso, offered me a double because she had to draw two instead of one, and I asked her birthday. She looked at me, "You're Kramer, right?"

I never got to finish the rest of the story, so in my parents' minds, it has become a myth.

Which has nothing to do with funky coffee shops, the little, one-off places.

Nicest Leo guy owns/operates the Hideout these days. Or he did. Haven't seen him in weeks. I stopped in one afternoon and I gave him some pat Leo advice, I'd just reread the scopes for the coming week, and it fit his situation perfectly. I like to be right, so do Leos, but

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that's not part of this discussion I'm having with my keyboard.

In passing, several times, I've learned that he bought the place to learn something about the business end of the business, which, apparently, he has. Much to his chagrin, he's also learned about the depth of depravity, too. Retail is like that. Never underestimate how cruel, vicious, mean-spirited, un-enlightened some people can be. I suppose, though, that those generalities cut right through just about everyone's business. Or even day-to-day human interactions.

I did learn more about coffee from one lad who worked at the Hideout than I've gleaned from most of the others. Taurus. He graduated to a real job, from what I last heard. That happens to some people.

The coffee shop metaphor isn't lost, though. Each place has its own little eccentricities. Even though Halcyon is nothing more than a really cleaned up Ruta Maya, there are days when I miss the shock value alone of a unisex bathroom. I don't think that would fly, not these days. And I'm not taking my funk too funky.

But each place has a signature, a feeling a gentleness of some kind or another. A warm greeting, a particular face manning (or "womanning"?) the espresso machine.

A recent occurrence at Bouldin was telling in this fashion. The proprietor (ess), Aries, was bussing a few tables. That's the way it goes with a small, so-called, "Mom & Pop" store. Which is nice to see. I owned a place once. My similar telling moment was returning from a gala event, dressed in a fancy suit, and having to plunge the toilet in the lady's room. Small business owners understand this. Oh, do we ever.

I streamlined the scopes to the most popular, weighing volume of traffic against time to write the material, and what would be easiest to maintain. I settled on weekly. I even, at one point, held down a regular (part-time) job to help keep this site afloat.

This last year has been good to me. However, on three separate occasions, I made more money at the casino, in a few hours' time, than I made meeting with clients all weekend. I'm not about to abandon what I enjoy doing, though, and run off to become a professional gambler. Some days, I don't win. Never take more than you're willing to lose.

I'd love to hit it big, and then, I'd just run this site for free. Scopes for free. All I would need then is a measly 4 million dollar lottery ticket. Unfortunately, I don't have one of those right now. Therefore, there has to be some way to pay for it all.

I've worked my way along, and more and more of the free web is starting to charge, or beg for bandwidth. There's an animated cartoon site I like. I looked into helping with hosting, but when I got to the fine print, I found out what the volume of bandwidth was, and I couldn't do that much, not without compromising my own site. Ever seen the "user has exceeded allotted bandwidth" messages? Yes sir, can't have that here.

I nipped, tucked, and sewed up as many loose ends as I could, and I'm loathe to run ads, but if I get paid for it, and if that money goes to defray the cost of running the site, then I'm going to do it. More than one email has suggested, "Run all the ads you want! Won't bother me! I don't pay attention to them anyway...."

That's the problem. Or part of the problem. No clicks means no revenue for the advertisers and that means no revenue for the site.

by Kramer Wetzel

I got one the other day, "I wouldn't want to pay for your stupid horoscopes anyway." Yes, I feel your pain. It hurts to think, doesn't it?

Rather sanctimonious of me, now isn't it? Must be me, then.

But that's what this is all about. A few egregious errors always make it through the editing process. No matter how many proofreaders proof the material, there's always one, two, maybe three that sneak through, right up until it's all live on Thursday morning at 12:00 AM (Mountain Time — where the server is.)

That's kind of like the mouse (computer mouse) with the bathroom key attached — at the Hideout. It's like the innkeeper at Boudlin bussing tables. It's like the rickety chairs at Little City with their canvas covers. It's that special touch. Means it's not homogenized or recycled from some other source, either.

It also means, when the plumbing is backed up? Only one person gets the joy of fixing it. That's me.

Original posted December 7, 2004

Write & erase

Write & erase, write and & erase (repeat as needed):

It's all about process. It's all about passion. It's all about heart's desire. I thought my original intent was to write about how to be an astrologer, but I realized that most of that was just the same information, slightly repackaged. The real trick is passion and process.

I covered a good 2K words, meandering around like I usually do, and I was attempting to distill what the essence of a particular type of endeavor requires. I stumbled into this business, not by a direct route, but sort of a backdoor — in other words, I didn't set out to do this, it has grown as an organic destination, and sometimes, that leaves the path to progress as a murky trail.

The most important component, what became apparent after writing and erasing all those words, was the point to this endeavor, or for that matter, just about any endeavor, the real trick is two-fold. Process and passion. Or passion and process.

Christopher Moore had a rather good and thoughtful bit of information about the process he goes through when he's writing a book. He's a Virgo, just sort of figures, right? I know, just from a casual glance, what kind of astrology chart he's got, and I understand the forces at work in his life. It's a generational influence that I'm looking at. I share that.

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So finding a niche, locating a place, a spot, a little but of turf to call my own, his own, your own, that's tough. That's the passion part of the deal.

I spent three years at a university, taking every creative writing class/workshop they offered. I studied with several well-known authors. I participated in countless workshops outside of the university environment. I learned, basically, one useful piece of information. Write every day. That's the process, pure and simple.

The passion is a little more difficult. Isolate what matters. Or, what interests grab the intellect.

I've got a number of different interests, from fishing to opera. What really interests me the most though, is psychology. Not the formal study of how people interact, but the informal study of humanity as whole, and individuals. That's also called literature. A little history, a little Western Lit, a few good thrillers, maybe even a Chris Moore book about zombies, sex and Christmas holidays?

It's got two parts, something I have passion about and then the process of putting that passion to the page.

Originally posted December 8, 2004

The Fine Print:

Ubiquitous fine print . . . Approved for septic tank use. All astrological information provided is deemed reliable but is not guaranteed. Information on this web site may contain inaccuracies or typographical errors. Information may be changed or updated without notice. Astrofish.net will not share your private information with any company, foreign government, or police agency, even if we are threatened with arrest, torture, or karaoke. Do not remove tag under penalty of law. Void where prohibited. Item sold by volume, not weight. Items may shift during flight. Objects in mirror are closer than they appear. This is a test. This is only a test. Had this been an actual emergency, you would have received further instructions on how the world will end. We now return you to your regularly scheduled program. No shoes, no shirt, no service. You must be at least THIS TALL to ride this ride. Toilet tissue only. Stand right, walk left. Please don't crack the whips. No food or drink, please. Only real phone calls, please, no imaginary ones. Total bill does not reflect gratuity. Entrada solo con boleto. One winner per household per 30 day period. No los mueva de su lugar. No outlet. Power plant entrance moved to Holly Street. Amici e maccheroni, se non sono caldi, non sono buoni. Toda mercancia garantizada a su satisfaccion. Cuidado al bajar. Please do not feed seagulls. Potable water only. All finished work left unclaimed will be sold off. Cold weather may cloud this product. Its antiseptic properties are not affected. Please do not throw away the fajita skillet. Please register for seating. Tow bar up when not in use. Sitting on the stairs is forbidden. Under 21 must pay to re-enter.

by Kramer Wetzel

Thirty:

The road does go on forever.

"Stay tuned, we'll back after a word from our sponsors!"

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