

THE COBRA'S NOSE

Vol. 43

“She doesn’t know what an unbirthday is.”

23 September 2006

The Cobra’s Notes

A while back, I was lounging on the futon with a fella in an inquisitive mood. He asked, “So what weird habits do you have that you wouldn’t want everybody to know about?”

Heh—as if I’d tell him that. But I did mention the one about how I imagine the world flipping over and how it used to make me edge out of the path of ceiling fans and potentially injurious objects that might protrude from the ceiling or otherwise be in the way from here to there.

I don’t see the fella any more, and haven’t had that fantasy (such as it is) for years. But last night I was messaging with my friend LadyKate—libertarian and Xena fan of note. She asked when I wrote my “Xenavision” article because she wanted to introduce it to the newbies on the Xena fan boards, with the bonus that this appeal to my vanity would get me back to commenting on whether Gabrielle’s demon child Hope would be redeemable under more favorable circumstances (no) and other burning Xena controversies.

So I looked up the old *Nose* and noted the date of release was 17 January 2001. In *The Cobra’s Notes* for that issue, I had written about the world flipping over, as described above. I don’t have that fantasy anymore and haven’t for a long time, perhaps because the world really did flip a few months after the release of Vol. 26. However, the scratch marks I had imagined for myself clawing my way back to September 10th don’t exist.

Don’t get me wrong—I still hate disturbance and change, but I don’t crave a return to the past. There are people I sorely miss, but if I’ve learned anything at all from zombie movies...well, that’s not going anywhere healthy. What I mean to say is my present has been pretty fabulous. I’ve never had a better year, and indicators for the future are excellent. Today, I will really celebrate my birthday for the first time in memory. For a good deal of that, I thank everybody reading this—you don’t know how much you mean to me. For some highlights of the year, please keep reading. The photographs are for your viewing pleasure, but almost none of them relate to the text. They’ll remind me of what I should keep doing, and to write about such things before they slip away. Or the world flips. Ah, heck, let it flip.

Have a wonderful whatever span of time till the next one of these things arrives, and hope my birthday is wonderful for you, too!



Sharon C. McGovern
Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief



Amy the Amazing “Jet” Maximum and I at the astounding Bryce Canyon. I didn’t get around to writing about this trip, but it was great. You should have been there.

The Social Event of Spring

Because she is amazing, Amy has an impressive circle of friends. Impressive both in number and in range of status—from the beautiful people of North Scottsdale to, well, me. But she’s kind enough to invite me to parties she’s been invited to, which gets me out of my apartment (where I tend to cocoon) and into something like a John Updike novel.

Hair Piece

For these events I find it’s helpful to look as little like my usual self as possible, a task helped immeasurably by my little (but growing!) collection of wigs. Blond Sharon seems to be a bit more sophisticated than the standard model, for instance, black-with-the-red highlights a bit smarter, and the little gold and red one requires me to wear a girle to get the correct overall profile so it’s a mixed bag. For this evening, not having the bread for a new wig and not of the opinion that any of my old ones suited the blouse I was planning to wear, I straightened my curly mop. The good news is the hank of hair I whacked away a couple of weeks ago as a partially successful mostly regrettable remedy to a bangs situation is hardly missed. The bad news is the gray becomes extra prominent, and what was intended to be sort of Angie Dickenson in *Police* (cont. on page 2)

(cont. from page 1) *Woman* but brown actually came out rather sad and dull and baked looking. Still! It was different so mission accomplished.

The party wasn't my only destination for the night. There's an artist in my neighborhood who is talented enough that I covet his work and nice enough that I wouldn't feel too whorish (only in the loosest use of the word, Kathleen) sucking up to him in an effort to get a substantial discount on it. So about halfway through the straightening of the hair, I trotted over to his girlfriend's (you guessed it—her name is Kathleen she's swell) home to check on the time for his show opening at a local wine salon. She wasn't there. "Must be helping with the show!" I thought. I returned home, hopped in the shower for a quick wash and learned that steam recurls my hair on contact.

A Spring Shower

And why was I so late in showering? Well, in fairness it was a second shower and my hair had been washed. But I had gone to my niece Sophia's third degree black belt graduation and watching her jump around and hit other children and break boards for three hours really took it out of me. Then there was the interminable speech about Vision given by the head of the Black Belt Academy. You have to have Vision to accomplish what you want in life! That's what we're teaching here, Vision! If kids don't have Vision, they will grow up to be...well, not exactly losers like all of you, but not all they can be! Vision, Vision, Vision!

You'd think that if his Vision were so red hot he'd have noticed about a hundred spectators wilting with boredom that even overpowered resentment. We were there! We were supportive! For a really long time! Give us a freakin' break! Or something like that, though most seemed too beaten down for exclamation points. Anyway, congratulations, Soph.

And off to Big Lots! for a curling iron. Did you know that some curling irons are made of ceramic to more evenly distribute heat and prevent the hair from burning? Neither did I until I was on my way home with one that was merely flocked and Amy called to bring me up to date on hair technology and to set a time to meet for the party. Right after the opening.

The Opening

Except there wasn't an opening, at least not that night. It had been postponed for three weeks, but I was welcome to stay for a glass of wine and a look around. I had known the place as a bakery I hated for personal

reasons, but which had the best biscotti I've ever eaten. Why must life be so hard? As a wine salon the place is lovely. The furniture is elegant but comfortable, the music low and tasteful. There are lots of little conversation nooks, and the art will be much better once Stephan gets his stuff in there. I asked the owner Jock (really) what the place had been in the past. Before it was the bakery, it was a Mafia controlled restaurant, and before that the offices for AJ Bailess. Back up—Mafia? Were there any murders? Why yes! Ever seen the movie *Casino*? Of course. Well, remember how the character played by Joe Pesci committed the unauthorized murder of another gang member which lead to his own execution later on? Well, that murder victim was the *maitre de* at the restaurant. He was killed in the cooler back there, and his body was thrown into the canal.

"Wow! Any ghosts?"

"No. Well, Philip says there are but nobody believes him."

Philip, the cute front office manager, scoffed. So apparently the ghosts are laying low for the time being, but if I learn more I'll pass it on in the next *Cobra's Ghost*.

The Main Event

And onto Amy's party. Or rather, the party for Amy's swank friends the Gillespies. It was held in North Scottsdale near the Arizona-Utah border. Most of the homes in the area are under construction, and all are of a vaguely European urban design, by which I mean big, upright homes packed close together. The host home was on a corner, and so enormous I took it for the neighborhood clubhouse. From the outside, we could hear live music, and see guests gazing down on the back patio from a balcony and stream of well-dressed guests streaming in through the front

"Did I mention that this party has a Vegas theme?" said Amy.

"Yay! I'll get to use my *Casino* anecdote!"

That thought lasted until I saw the buffet and realized my supper of Oreos was a bit insufficient. Hm...this is what? Just serve yourself? I smiled at the server, then got a drink and circulated a bit. Nobody else was eating a meal, and there didn't seem to be a good place to sit with a meal that required knife and fork. Was the buffet just a lure to entrap gauche guests? I took another sip and realized I didn't really know anybody there besides Amy, who has seen me demolish a slice of beef and our relationship survived. So I filled a plate, chose a strategic place on a couch near a photo of the Acropolis ("you've never been?"), and dug in.

What the...

HEY! What happened to the text I put in here? I blame

Microsoft. Or better yet, the Illuminati. Yeah, I said it, you Illuminati bastards! Come and get me if you dare!

Return

Okay, where were we? I'm sitting on the couch with my meal when a guy I'd met upstairs sits next to me and we speak. He's nice looking, successful, well traveled and spoken—so not my type. I can't think of a single interesting thing to discuss with him, so he leaves and Amy comes over looking a little antsy to tell you the truth. Actually, she looks fabulous in a silk jacket she bought which was Asian designed and Asian made. That means it fits her slender waist but has to be opened up at top to accommodate her bosom (which is covered to a socially acceptable extent by a cute little tank, for all you perverts out there who jumped to conclusions). She's also wearing a suite of amber jewelry—but still, a little antsy. Don't know why. Well, later on, she described the event as "the gathering where everybody is 5'4" and Amy! did you meet my bald homely friend with two children?" and that was probably the reason.

She did brighten when a lady guest entered the living room. "Will you look at that rock!" she said, and rushed to the woman's side who, come to think of it, did have quite a ring on her finger. (cont. on page 7)



Behold! The power of wig! This was my favorite New Year's Eve to date. I didn't write about it, either. Oh, and that's Paul.

LACOBRA THE SECOND

“You know when you have a boyfriend who everybody hates but nobody tells you that until you break up with him?” said Amy. “That’s how we all felt about your car.”

I couldn’t quite get my mind around having a boyfriend, but understood the sentiment from movies, television and the like. And I certainly had no idea my car had engendered so much hostility amongst my friends and family. It had until recently been reliable. It had absolutely no chance of attracting thieves. That’s why I could leave it unlocked. If it caught the attention of the criminal element they were welcome to open a door and have a look around without bothering to crack a window. Besides, the front passenger door no longer responded to the key, so it was just easier.

Best of all, it had cobra stuff all over it! My old cobra head gear shift and cobra head door locks adorned the shelf by the back window, it had a *fierce* cobra decal on the front window (it looked as if it took a bite out of the Apple logo next to it). It had a light up cobra in the cigarette lighter. Its most recent and spectacular addition was the vanity plate: LACOBRA. LACOBRA! Can you believe that name hadn’t been snapped up long before?

“You can move ALL that crap to another car,” said Partick.

Did I mention it passed the emissions test on the first try?

But it did start to show its age. A noise from the front wheel area was diagnosed by a local mechanic as a minor brake problem. Then it was re-diagnosed as a major brake problem and the quote I was given tripled. Two days later, it stopped—just stopped! engine light went on, everything else off—a few blocks from my house. At least it was close and in a safe place, I reasoned. Fortunately, I’ve got a tiny amount of towing insurance through my phone plan. Enough to get the car home without a charge.

But what then? I didn’t know any good local mechanics and still felt burned by the scoundrels who did my brakes (and whom I could not help but blame for my current fix).

Fortunately, I live next door to Amy. This is a blessing for a lot of reasons, but in this instance it was because she introduced me to her mechanic, Vibert. Actually, I’d met Vibert a couple years back, but no matter how often she said, “my friend Vibert, the mobile mechanic whom I’ve trusted with my car for years and it runs like a dream” [she has a Camry, but removed letters on the back so it reads : AM:Y], well, it didn’t sink in. But, wow! He came over to my house while I was at work and got it running again. Great!

Then about a week later, it stopped again, just as I was crossing the first street on my way to work. Because Amy is my neighbor, she helped me push it to safety, then permitted her darling brother Mikey to work on it after she drove me to work.



I traveled all the way to Greece to see these two (the marvelous Partick & Pagona) get married. My notes are around here somewhere...

I basked in my good fortune, but in retrospect am beginning to understand why my loved ones hate LACOBRA the First. Mikey got the car to run, and I ran it to Vibert’s shop.

He had a look, but couldn’t figure out why it kept blowing fuses. “It runs fine,” he said. “Come and pick it up.” My boss Lynn dropped me off and I went ‘round back to his shop. The car was jacked up on one side and the lid was up, and the engine looked wonderful! So clean! I complimented Vibert on how swell it looked and he said, “Yeah. I washed the engine, now it doesn’t start.”

Vibert’s shop is near the airport, so I sat and watched planes until he found the problem. It’s a pretty big problem, and one that he could only temporarily fix at the time. He also warned me that I seemed to be developing a leak in the cooling system and keep an eye on it. Okay!

We started driving home. We were going to meet at Amy’s house so she could show (cont. on page 6)

The Case of Cobra’s Cable

The following story is fictional and does not depict any actual person or event.

When I moved into the current Cobra HQ, which I love, I got high speed internet, which I also love. For a mere five dollar a month more (mm hm), I got a limited amount of cable—all the local channels (but at digital quality!), religious station, Mexican station, and that one out of Chicago that has been on cable since cable began. Except, by some happy accident, I received the entire basic cable set. TLC (*What Not to Wear!*), History Channel, A&E—the works. Wonderful!

But being the type to look a gift horse in the mouth, I tortured myself over theft of services and waste of time and am I actually getting billed for this? and CRAP. So I called Cox and blew the whistle on myself.

“Oh! We didn’t realize you were receiving those services, but we will turn them off immediately!” Well, those were the words of the Cox rep, but the meaning was, “Sucker.” And they weren’t kidding about “immediately.” All those semi-premium channels (except Discovery, for some reason) were gone by the time I got home from work. Getting the high speed internet took three days, *elimination* of services...but this is no time for bitterness.

Although there was some of that when word got out (because I told everybody). My good deed was not perceived as an act of virtue, but of dorkishness. I was not saving money, and I wasn’t watching less TV—I was watching worse TV. If you find yourself watching an entire episode of *Criminal Minds* at home alone—and you will be alone—your life must change.

Fortunately, The Universe, benevolent entity, gave me another shot. When the Amazing Amy moved in next door, she ordered high speed internet and basic cable. Three torturous days later, she got the internet and I got the cable. Later she cancelled her cable because she was watching it all day and didn’t want to pay so much for that burden on her time—but I still have it!

And *Criminal Minds* comes in crystal clear.

With the writing of the new *Nose* roughly corresponding with the release of a new M. Night Shyamalan production, I figured this was a good time to take another whack at him.

Actually, that's too harsh. I kind of liked his last movie, *The Village*. Don't get me wrong—it was stupid and nutty as all get out. But in a heroic age, when some of the most significant and profitable movies the past few years have had heroic themes, it takes a weird sort of moxie to create a seventy million dollar ode to cowardice. (This is where I'd normally insert a spoiler warning, but come on—if you'd really wanted to, you'd have seen *The Village* by now.) The story is about an old timey communal community terrorized by monsters that JUST HATE the unauthorized use of the color red. So their sentries wear yellow and stomp red flowers. The kids test their bravery by turning their backs on the perimeter of *The Village* (and thereby the monsters who apparently have never hurt a single human, ever). The inarticulate hero of the movie turned his back on the monsters for a record amount of time.

Turns out, *The Village* Elders aren't the early-American-settlers-of-European-descent (whew!) the audience have been led to believe (which makes sense because the early-American-settlers-of-European-descent were incredibly courageous) but a bunch of pansies who couldn't handle the violence and tragedy of modern life and decided to live in the past. So it super sucks when *The Village* Idiot gets stabby and they're at such a distance from the "towns" where the "medicines" can be found. And if you think I'm making any of this up, you should rent *The Village*. It'll serve you right.

Heroism is always a big draw in the popular arts, but these days it seems to have been driven almost exclusively into the land of fantasy. Some of my favorite movies from the past few years have addressed recent events, though in code. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, for example, shows how the men of the west find the will to fight a vicious and aggressive enemy (after being shamed into it by a collection of wizards, Hobbits, elves, and the like). In one of the commentary tracks on *The Two Towers*, the writers recalled writing Sam's speech that ends with, "That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo... and it's worth fighting for." "It's like something George Bush would say!" they fretted. But to their credit, they left it in, anyway.

The Incredibles told the story of a superhero couple and their super-gifted children forced into a pretence of normalcy, debasing themselves at the demand of petty bureaucrats—much like the EU. Reviews were excellent, but a surprising number of reviewers fretted over the plot's indebtedness to Ayn Rand and its alleged Nietzscheism and

We DO Need Another Hero (especially if they're human beings)



Earth's latest Third Degree Blackbelt. Might want to start working on that secret identity, Soph.

exposed their Lilliputian concerns over exceptionalism. *The Incredibles* is a great un-leveler. Some people are just *better*, it argues, and while their enemies may have compelling complaints in the end the enemies are recognized as dangerous and have got to go.

Similarly, the *X-Men* movies have genetically variant characters. They form two tribes who have greater or lesser affection for the human race as it is traditionally recognized. The head of the villainous group is a concentration camp survivor who becomes the greatest proponent of an emerging mutant super-race, a conceit woosily echoed in those Zionism=Nazism signs familiar from "peace" protests of recent years. The head of the human-tolerant group is kidnapped by the evil bunch and his superpower is very nearly used to murder every human on earth, which, as a humble human, would give me pause if I actually lived in that world. The two sects war with one another and cause so much property damage that on those grounds alone I lost sympathy for the bunch of them. And that goes double for the *Matrix* sequels. If the idea is that my life is expendable because I'm not as enlightened as Keanu Reeves, include me out. The premise of both sets of these movies is little more than righteous alienation (the second *X-Men* movie, for example, features a thinly veiled gay coming-out story). The mutants aren't heroic because they strive or sacrifice; they are just projections of nerds with persecution complexes.

Now I risk blasphemy to include *The Passion of the Christ* in the superhero group. But the Christ story is an exemplary heroic myth, and the concentration on His willing suffering is impressive. During the course of the movie, every major character is shown in a moment of weakness and, with the exception of Jesus and His mother Mary, failure. Christ is abandoned, betrayed, and condemned by good people who blow it. Even Mary waivers, recalling how she could embrace and comfort her young son after a fall—but ultimately realizes that for this punishing task her duty is to hang back, and bear witness. Critics who dismissed the film as some sort of snuff flick or, worse, condemned it as an anti-Semitic creation that would lead to a rash of hate crimes against Jews worldwide, were rather heroically obtuse. The film depicts a hero who will not falter and shows in pulpy detail what that means; a hero who upon resurrection radiates resolve—*Let's roll*.

Batman Begins is the story of an heir of a historically Republican (well, likely so—their mansion was a stop on the underground railroad and Republicans were the abolitionist party) who rejects the wimp ethos of his limousine liberal parents. While projecting the image of fecklessness and decadence, he learns the responsible use of great wealth and power that includes "dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success" (that really was from a State of the Union address), while battling a fundamentalist, terrorist sect. Most of the (cont. on page 8)

Finally, a Use for Grapefruit

Are you tired, as I am, of slaving over a hot stove? Then please enjoy the following cool and refreshing recipe!

Those who know me know I will happily peel a piece of plastic off a food item in order to get at, say, a Mars Bar, but am reluctant to peel a peel to get at fruit. Because face it, what you get is fruit, and it's full of stringy membrane and seeds, will likely leave a creepy, naked feeling on the teeth, and has a tendency to squirt juice all over your shirt (or eyes!) and since there's acid in it, it's something that should be washed out right away with club soda before you get a bunch of pale spots on your clothes...okay, that won't happen on my watch and it's not like my shirt budget is HUGE, so when it comes right down to it, fruit and especially *citrus* is a menace.

But here is a recipe that helps grapefruit redeem itself, against all odds.

- 1) Put vodka in a glass, amount depending on what kind of day you've had.
- 2) Squeeze in the juice of whatever fruit you picked from the tree outside your house (again, this may vary).
- 3) I used to use half an orange, because that seemed like quite enough, and I'd also throw the squeezed portion in, including the peel because it looked sort of festive.
- 4) But then after I picked all the oranges I could reach, I started going after the grapefruit (devil produce) and decided the peel was too prohibitively large to include.
- 5) And due to a plague of gnats that has descended upon our neighborhood, I would squeeze in the entire fruit and dispose of the peels so as to rob the rotten little parasites of sustenance.
- 6) Which left only a bit of room for tonic and ice, but you know what? It tasted terrific that way!
- 7) Seriously! Grapefruit!

It's called a "Cobra," and please feel free to enjoy them in your homes and start ordering them in your clubs and bars.

Cobra's Recipe Nook

Clip 'n' Save!



Slushing with the Elegant Evelyn

Guest Cook Evelyn Jensen offers the following summer treat!

Well, I can't manifest a guy (not true, as recent events have showed—ed), but I CAN mix a mean summer beverage! If you don't have an entry for your "Cookin' with Cobra" section, I submit the following:

I've created a delicious summer beverage using the hot cocoa mix I brought home from Switzerland. You've got to try it. You'll need the following:

- o Gourmet Hot Cocoa Mix in DARK chocolate
- o Milk (Skim, 2% or Whole, depending on how much fat you want in your beverage)

- o Frangelico OR Bailey's (again, depending on your diet—both are equally scrumptious)
- o Ice
- o A Blender

Directions are per serving:

Put 6-8 ice cubes in a blender. Add two parts milk and one part Frangelico or Bailey's (both are equally scrumptious). The liquid should cover a little more than half of the ice. Cover and start the blender.

Add two heaping tablespoons of the cocoa mix and blend until it's a slushy. Mmm Mmmm good!!!

Cobra Entrée the First

Ingredients:

- Pasta-Roni (one box)
- Butter or margarine (see Pasta-Roni box)
- Milk (see Pasta-Roni box)
- Water (see Pasta-Roni box)
- Salt (a few shakes worth)
- Olive oil (enough to create a spot about the size of a dollar—a paper one—on the bottom of a pan)
- Frozen vegetables (as many as you can bear)

Because even Cobra cannot live on Cobras alone—though it's not the worst way to spend a weekend—here is a recipe for solid food.

First, buy the Pasta-Roni of your choice and prepare according to the directions on the box. I recommend the microwave option as your stovetop will be busy. Besides, it will keep you from having to stir two things more or less simultaneously because that's no way to live. But either way takes up to fifteen minutes, so you might want to have a light snack handy.

Turn one of the "burners" to low heat, put a pan over it, and pour some olive oil in. I've used super-virgin olive oil pressed by one of Pagona's uncles that had a magnificent, almost luminous green color. It was great. I've also used

much paler, cheaper, so-no virgin olive oil which I bought mostly because I heard it might work as a deep conditioner for my hair. Honestly, in this recipe I couldn't tell the difference. Maybe if I did a side to side comparison...but anyway, if that sort of thing is important to you, follow your heart.

Salt the oil. Add the frozen vegetables. I go with about half a small bag of whatever mixed variety was on sale last time I shopped, but again, only you know you and what you will eat.

Right about now, you will probably hear the first beep of the microwave telling you to stir the pasta and maybe add the cheese and seasoning packet.

You'll want to keep an eye on the vegetables. Keep pushing them around the pan so they don't burn, which can happen even on low heat. This is a process known as "sautéing." It's really boring, so you might want to have a drink handy as well.

When the vegetables are done (that means the baby carrots are no longer frozen in the middle) and the Pasta-Roni is done (noodles limp, sauce thickening), combine them. That's right—put the vegetables right in the microwave safe dish, and stir a final time. Retire to your futon and enjoy!

Serving note—goes great with Cobras.

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(cont. from page 3) off Mikey and his delightful girlfriend Isa. I was in the left lane, he was in the right lane a little behind me when engine light! The car was coasting, then it kind of started up again. I began to wave frantically to Vibert, who had caught up to me and gave a big smile and friendly wave. “No, no, no!” I shouted, and started pumping my hand in an unnatural, palm down gesture I hoped would indicate *danger!* “Bad wave! Bad wave!” We pulled over.

“Does the car start now?” he asked. It did. “Don’t worry about it, just go home.”

So I didn’t worry and went home and the car has started every since. It also started leaking like a sieve. And shaking. Overheating. So I took it in...

And this is where the story changes from the usual Cobra Car diatribe and into a spiritual journey.

Amy has spoken for some time about The Universe and its powers. I’ve seen her ask it for small but necessary favors, like a parking space on the jam packed streets of San Diego scant minutes before she was to run her third marathon. “Ask it for a corner space so I can back out of it,” I added. And there it was—only about two blocks away from her assigned corral. That may not sound like much unless you’ve experienced the Nightmare that is Marathon Traffic (I refuse to run them in protest). But the odds of happening upon a parking spot close

to the starting line on a corner under those circumstances were vanishingly small. I’ve heard her lament that she seems to squander so much of this power asking for favorable traffic signals.

Still, I didn’t really know what she was going on about until she burned a cd for me of Mike Dooley speaking about how Thoughts Become Things (if Mike Dooley is reading

this, that means “ordered me up a copy”—I’m a lousy typist). I started listening to it the day after our Movie Star Party and mostly thought, “I hate my closet doors and think drapes would look much better there instead.” I manifested that thought right away, and additionally rearranged my furniture in a much more pleasing and functional manner. I’m not saying that’s a miracle, but if it weren’t weird, I’d invite you all over to have a look.

Amy gave me more cds, and on one of them Mike Dooley says if you want a new car you should visualize driving it, putting a cd in the player, be specific about anything you want. So I gave it a try. I lay in bed as cool, evaporated air wafted over me, and pictured myself in something reliable, and sliding a cd into a slot on the dash. This was pretty sweet considering LACOBRA didn’t even have a cassette player. Then I fell asleep.

The next day I took my car in for a bit of crisis management, which was not resolved by the end of the day. My friends and family had been wonderfully helpful in getting me to and fro so far, but to make my life even easier, Vibert offered to loan me his car to drive home. He’s bought it off a client who would rather unload it than pay for the repairs it needed, so it was kind of a spare. I was happy and grateful for a vehicle to whisk myself home in (that’s where I keep my beer), and to drive to work the following morning. When I called from work, Vibert said my car would be finished in time for me to pick it up, but by the way, what did I think of the loaner?

That could be called planting the seed, though Vibert denied it. I recovered my car that afternoon, leak free but with a rattle bad enough that I drove straight to Vibert’s shop on the way home the next day and was lucky enough to catch him in. We worked finalized a deal by which he took on LACOBRA the First and released LACOBRA the Pending into my custody.

My decision was met by universal acclaim. It



This is what you can expect to see immediately before the big cloud of dust. (Photo credit, Amazing Amy)

was little alarming, back to that hated ex-boyfriend thing. People actually *beamed*. Some hugged. I have no animosity toward the old car, though it has been nearly stripped of cobra items and is thus considerably less interesting. But this new one is really something. Especially since I moved the light-up cobra and the cobra license plate frame and (drum roll, please) the LACOBRA plate to the Mazda.

The experience got me thinking, though. When I bought the last car, it was precisely what I had in mind, as was the car before that one. So much of what I have is as I imagined it would be, for better or worse. So maybe...I should imagine something more?

Amy is still my guide here, though others have also come forth. I haven’t imagined a lot for my future because I feel crushed when I don’t get what I want and guilty when I do. How ‘bout I don’t feel like that any more? Well, with cars at least?

Money, no problem. Wealth and abundance, that’s my new thing. Don’t know how I’ll get it, but I visualize my checking account full to bursting. I’ve already gotten a promised tax return from the State of Arizona (why did I owe so much to them, anyway? JEEZ). And after Amy’s What Not to Wear conversion (another article), she told me, “Whenever I felt as if I had spent too much for my transformation, I’d find a penny or a nickel on the street or just around. It was like the Universe was telling me that I’d be fine with the cash flow.”

Today I found a dime.



Yeah, there is a heck of a story behind this.

Interlude (cont. from page 2)

The first time I went anywhere with Amy was to Costco. We went because a day or so earlier, Amy asked me if she should sell her old engagement ring. “This is me with the ring,” she said, holding up her right hand, smiling a queenly smile and giving a regal wave. “This is me without it,” she said, dropping her hand below the reception desk, rolling her eyes heavenward, and heaving a sigh. “I’ve seen you come in every day for about two weeks and never once noticed your ring,” I replied. That was when we realized we might become good friends, but I definitely had a lot to learn about jewelry. At Costco, we looked at an assortment of gems and she briefed me on which cuts and settings were acceptable. She was still looking when we were in the food court and this woman sporting a gigantic diamond ring passed by. Amy said, “Excuse me...,” and made the woman’s acquaintance. I only had eyes for my hot dog on that occasion, and our appetites haven’t changed appreciably since. But thus are friendships born.

In the Shadow of the Acropolis Photo

A woman sat in the place Amy vacated. “Look, the Acropolis,” I said. “Ever been?” I didn’t get to my *Casino* anecdote, but promised to tell her if we met again that evening before she darted off. I looked at the empty seat, then to the trio of way too skinny and cool for the likes of me to the right, and abandoning my empty plate and glass to be collected by the tiny Latin clean-up crew got up to work the room.

Some of the guests made the most of the theme and wore bridal outfits or swinger outfits, or were in drag with lewd signs...something to do with lollypops...? on them. One was a centurion. I met him later. The rest I did not meet. Until I sidled up to a craps table, next to a handsome blond fella in a tuxedo.

Craps is a confusing game, and all the times I’ve watched *Gilda* have done nothing to clarify it. But it does give me an excuse to talk about *Gilda* whilst pretending to learn. “Do you make your own luck?” I asked Mr. Blond. He explained about how sevens are desirable except when they aren’t and introduced me to the centurion, Todd. He gave me some chips and we played till they we lost them, then we meandered to the roulette table.

There we saw Amy with a short, balding man. Roulette seems like an even worse bet than craps, if somewhat more straightforward. Amy had a

skeptical aspect, but she gave me one of those frown-raised-eyebrow combos that indicated she approved of Mr. Blond. He and I, having no chips to bet, went to the porch in search of red wine. “Have you seen the movie *Casino*?” I asked, and he let me tell my anecdote. He said something about the deviousness of human nature, and I (mis)quoted *The African Queen*—“Nature, Mr. Allnut, is what we are here to overcome.” “You know,” he said, when most people talk about movies, they don’t talk about *Gilda* or Bogart or *The African Queen*.” I thought it best not to mention that when I talk about *Gilda* or Bogart or *The African Queen* people tend to make their excuses and wander away.

But I did panic and when I spotted the woman from earlier I excused myself, rushed up to her and told her and her husband the *Casino* story. They said they had to leave. Dang it. Next time, include the ghost. Better contact Philip for a follow up. I found Mr. Blond again, upstairs, waiting for the auction.

The Auction

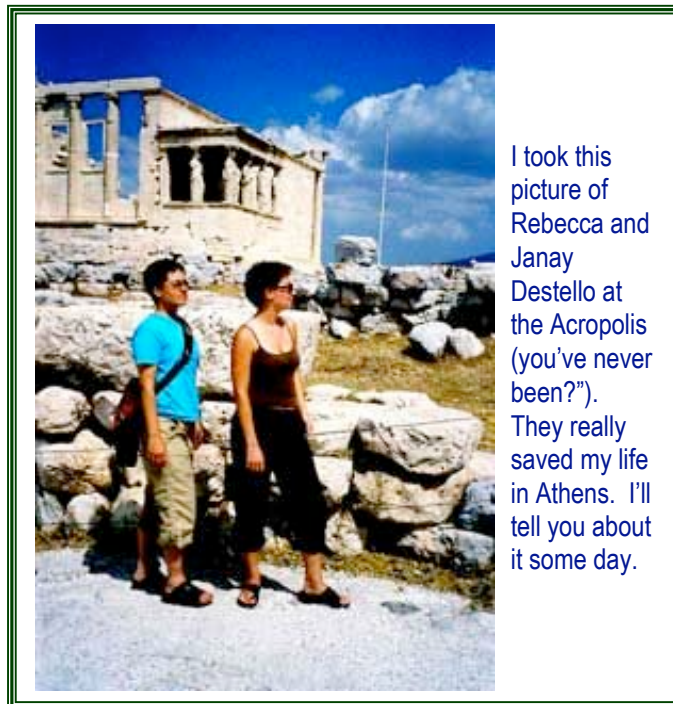
Sending party guests home with a small gift is a terrific idea. Lou Reed, for instance, sings about Andy Warhol doing it: “It’s a Czechoslovakian custom my mother passed on to me/ Give people little presents so they remember me.” And Big Lots! is a terrific place to find all sorts of mad stuff costing thirty-nine cents for people to fish out of a bag whilst Partick shouts “DOOR PRIZE!” and cracks jokes (“Best surname—Jen Semon!”). Then you get to take a lot of photos of Josette pretending to eat a rubber lizard or Will proudly holding aloft a can of cat food, et cetera.

But these Vegas themed auction items were something else. Most had much more in common with baskets prepared for celebrities at charity events than anything I would consider presenting to somebody just because they showed up at my party and found fortune at the roulette table. The currency for the auction was tickets cashed in for chips won gambling. The chips, I believe, originated in complimentary bags presented to those who didn’t have to journey from distant southern climes and therefore arrived earlier in the evening. Todd was standing with Mr. Blond, and between them they had four tickets. Mr. Blond gave me two of them (enough for the Celine Dion mouse pad? Please, please, please!) and we exchanged cards, and for once in my life I figured I had this whole social interaction code cracked.

Then came the decline.

The Decline and Fall of the Cobra Empire

Amy arrived on the scene to hear me answer Mr. Blond’s question, “Is your phone number on this card?” with “No, but my e-mail address is.” She gripped my arm—“Did you just



I took this picture of Rebecca and Janay Destello at the Acropolis (you’ve never been?”). They really saved my life in Athens. I’ll tell you about it some day.

refuse to give him your number?” “No, no. I just told him it wasn’t on the...wait—is that the same thing?” Amy shook her head sadly. Then, Mr. Blond and Todd asked to meet my fascinating friend. Sure! Everybody should meet Amy! But even as it happened, I felt like William Miller in *Almost Famous* introducing Penny Lane to his new rock star friend, that feeling of, “Whoa, this might have been a mistake.” And if you don’t know what I’m talking about it’s your own fault, I’ve been telling you to see *Almost Famous* for years. But I stand by my decision. Everybody should meet Amy.

The auction went on and the auctioneers were getting testy. Interest in the items just wasn’t what they anticipated. “This is a *good bargain*, people! Do you have any idea what this would cost retail?” They decided to allow American dollars to be used in place of tickets, and that’s what led to my next catastrophe. Todd, Mr. Blond, and I pooled our (okay, their) tickets, plus two dollars (neither mine), and we bought a basket with a bottle of wine in it, plus little decorative plaques. Almost immediately, I tilted the basket and watched the bottle push through the cellophane, fall in slow motion, then SMASH on the floor. Thank heaven it was white wine, and had a delicious smell that the squad deployed to clean up the mess maybe wouldn’t have an impossible time eradicating. I apologized to every one of them who came up, plus a few other workers downstairs. Breaking things puts me in a near frenzy, though you’d think I’d be used to it by now. The irrevocability of it stings me, like a long, thin) needle that penetrates my sternum (cont. on page 8)

(cont. from page 7) and pokes me in the heart. And if you think that's drama, man you should see what happens when I burn food.

There were, handily enough, three decorative plaques, the one Todd liked, the one he thought Mr. Blond (who had slipped away again) would like, and the orange one that fit nicely into my coat pocket. There was also the basket. "Here, Todd—take the basket," I said. "No, that's okay, you take the basket." Could be he was being polite, or maybe he's just not into baskets. But I, I hate baskets. I have a loathing for baskets that borders on the pathological. "No, really, Todd—I break things and don't deserve the basket." "Don't be silly. The basket is all yours."

Mr. Blond reappeared. "Here," I said, "have a basket." "I don't want the basket." And because nothing facilitates a budding relationship like a little light extortion, I pulled his card out of my pocket and said, "If you don't take the basket, I'll sign you up for every bit of spam I can think of." So the card exchange proved profitable after all. He took the basket, and I was so relieved to be rid of it that I left the party with a light heart.

Exeunt

Amy and I went downstairs, which was pretty empty though the hour wasn't terribly late. Turns out upper class decadence is mellower than John Updike's accounts of it from a couple decades back. I overheard random discussions of violated HOA regulations and sightings of security personnel, which seemed a lot of bother considering the loudest, most irresponsible thing I witnessed all night was the destruction of that poor bottle. But even that trauma was alleviated by Amy's company—the gossip and complaints that make me laugh out loud—the clear and pleasant northern sky packed with stars, and me in a basket-free condition. That is the memory, the Vision, if you will, that I have of the evening.

PS We later did get a ghost story out of Philip—stay tuned.

Page Eight



This is Mom with Wiley—a dog she obtained on her own initiative. Do you have any idea how unusual that is? Let's have lunch and we'll chat.

(cont. from page 4) major cast plus the writer-director of the movie are from the UK—but this Batman is a neo-con.

The first *Spider-Man* movie, which was in production during the September 11 attacks, director Sam Raimi festooned Brooklyn with American flags and added a short scene of native New Yorkers throwing garbage at the villain and shouting, "You mess with one of us, you mess with all of us!" Other than to annoy him, the garbage has little effect on the Green Goblin and it's Spider-Man duty to finish him off and take the mantle of hero. But that is a heartbreaking role for which Peter Parker sacrifices love, comfort, security and all his hopes for the future.

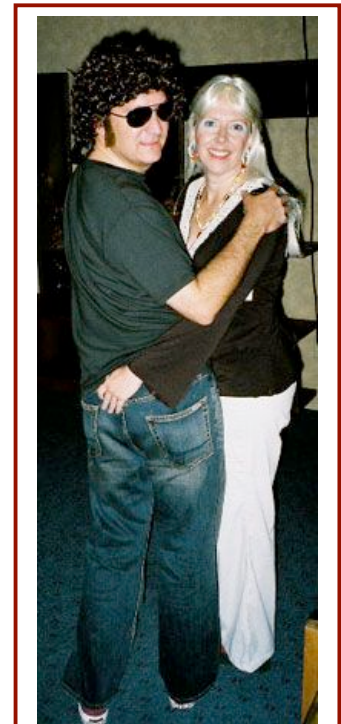
In the sequel, Spider-Man is knocked unconscious following a fight on an elevated train. His mask has been stripped off and the passengers see the face of the mysterious superhero and marvel at his youth. One notes he has a son about that age. Together, they lift

him up over their heads, a tribute to all the brave, young, anonymous men in their uniforms who protect them every day. It's a lovely touch, especially in contrast to the homo-erotic ass-hattery of *Jarhead* (released the following year), which is too idiotic to even be an embarrassment to the Marine Corps or the movies whose imagery it loots.

A fantasy film, *War of the Worlds*, was the first major US production to use September 11 imagery. It begins in New York City, where aliens act upon a long planned plot to dominate the earth. The aliens (a term of convenience—the filmmakers went to lengths not to term the creatures "aliens" in the script) vaporize Tom Cruise's neighbors, and horrified he frantically brushes their ashes from his clothes and hair. The scene recalls an account from *The Wall Street Journal* of a widow whose husband was killed in the Twin Towers. She described returning again and again to the scene where the dust never seemed to settle. She breathed it in because that was all she had left of her atomized husband.

The difference in the reactions points up the primary weakness of the movie—it is in denial. Steven Spielberg is a great artist, but lately incapable of creating drama that doesn't conclude with the resolution of family crises. That's fine if the movie is *Catch Me if You Can*, which is about a boy's reaction to the break-up of his family. But when the movie aspires to be an allegory of recent events such as *Minority Report* (which was nearly a thoughtful critique of profiling and surveillance in the age of modern terrorism) or *War of the Worlds*, the patch-ups are implausible and unsatisfying. In *Worlds*, for example, Tom Cruise's son, Robbie—a caring, capable young man and natural leader—tells his father he must fight the aliens and runs toward the killer tripods. It's a moving moment, and a reminder of gallant men and women who volunteer to leave their families to serve a greater good by confronting that which most instinctually avoid...and it's utterly undermined when the boy is found safe at his mother's miraculously undamaged family home in Boston. The audience I saw it with audibly groaned at the revelation, not because we were so eager to see kid die but because it was emblematic of the essential gutlessness of the movie. The crisis the movie alludes to will claim lives, among them the best and most noble youths in this country who will die to protect the rest of us. Robbie's implausible return undermined the most important statement the movie had to make.

On the other hand, the outcome might have been far worse. Screenwriter David Koepp (who also wrote the first *Spider-Man* movie) gave interviews in Canada and Germany in which he declared the



Don & Leslie. If you want to know if they look like this full time, you'll have to ask them.

aliens in the movie were analogous to the US Armed Forces, which presumably casts the human race in the role of such plucky resisters as Al Queda and its offshoots and allies. Thanks, man! Curiously, this insight wasn't included on the dvd release of *War of the Worlds*.

While I did enjoy and admire *Minority Report* and *War of the Worlds* and appreciate Spielberg's humanist impulses, he doesn't seem to have the capacity to think on a grand scale. Like in *Saving Private Ryan*, the sergeant declares, "Someday we might look back on this and decide that saving Private Ryan was the one decent thing we were able to pull out of this whole godawful, s****y mess." One decent thing? Didn't it occur to the filmmakers to have somebody protest that fighting Nazis was maybe another decent thing? They made a point of having a bi-racial actor in the supporting cast and a Jewish character taunted captured Germans, but the ultimate thrust of the narrative was to pluck a young man out of the fray and send him back to mom. The fate of this crazy world doesn't amount to a hill of beans compared to the problems of a handful of characters in these films, and that renders them insufficient both as art and examples.

The first feature film in the US specifically about the September 11 attacks was nearly five years in coming (there were a couple of TV movies made for lesser cable channels and a British release that told the story from the POV of the terrorists). *United 93* meticulously recounts the horrible events of September 11, 2001 from the standpoint of the well meaning but overwhelmed air traffic controllers and stunned military, and from within the titular plane. The dread that grows in the first two groups as one plane after another drops off the radar is contrasted with the blithe unconcern of the passengers who would become the only effective defenders of this nation on that day. They are by and large an unassuming collection of women and men and kids who barely notice the nervous and intense Arabs in their midst. Because of delays on the part of the airline and of the hijackers themselves, when things get bad the passengers can call their families and learn the fates of other planes captured that morning. They quickly lose their illusions that they are headed to Cuba or any other safe harbor and begin to plan.

We all know their ultimate fate, and the movie recreation cannot help but be an interpretation, however carefully devised. But what moved me most in the film were the actions of Thomas E. Burnett. At first, the quiet and deliberate businessman with a laptop, he becomes the quiet and deliberate leader of the on-board resistance. His resolve—cool and imperturbable as a deep river—contrasts with the increasingly jumpy hijackers. "DON'T USE THE PHONE!" the passenger wrangler screams as

Detect a Trend—Domestic Box Office Totals from the Past Five Years

2005

- 1 *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith*
- 2 *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*
- 3 *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
- 4 *War of the Worlds*
- 5 *King Kong*

2004

- 1 *Shrek 2*
- 2 *Spider-Man 2*
- 3 *The Passion of the Christ*
- 4 *Meet the Fockers*
- 5 *The Incredibles*

2003

- 1 *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*
- 2 *Finding Nemo*
- 3 *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*
- 4 *The Matrix Reloaded*
- 5 *Bruce Almighty*

2002

- 1 *Spider-Man*
- 2 *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*
- 3 *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones*
- 4 *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
- 5 *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*

2001

- 1 *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
- 2 *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*
- 3 *Shrek*
- 4 *Monsters, Inc.*
- 5 *Rush Hour 2*

Source: www.boxofficemojo.com



A hostage situation—but surely you saw something about it on CNN. That's Darin with the weapon, Shane with the expression, and Mira in the corner (you'll get a better picture next time, Mira).

Burnett punches in his credit card number. "STAY IN YOUR SEATS!" as he ducks down and crosses the aisle to confer with his fellow businessmen. "We have to do something," he says. "They are not going to land this plane."

This is more remarkable than it should be. Decades of pop culture have inculcated the myth that business is a corrupting force and businessmen are diabolical. Even in most of the examples above, business is portrayed as an oppressive force. In *The Incredibles*, Mr. Incredible is trapped in a lifeless insurance office—one of many unfulfilling white-collar jobs. In *Spider-Man*, the villain is the president of a defense company whose displacement pushes him over the edge. The villain in *Spider-Man 2* is his employee, and the villain in a pending *Spider-Man* movie is his son. In *Batman*, self-satisfied businessmen try to rob Bruce Wayne of his fortune, and his mob enemies are shown as their

slightly more corrupt counterparts. In the *Lord of the Rings* movies, the evil wizard and giant eyeball are also industrialist powers. *The Matrix* itself is industry run amok (salvation is found in underground, third world squalor), and the theme of the *X-Men* movies can be generalized as natural born oddballs vs. the squares. And so forth. But in real life, on flight 93, businessmen like those who fly on every plane and sit in every office were heroes.

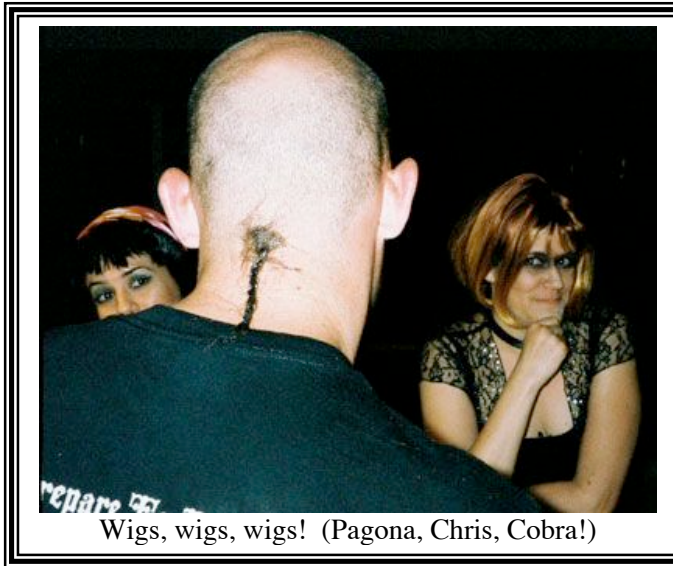
Why is this so important? Well, to quote Aunt May (courtesy screenwriter Alvin Sargent) in *Spider-Man 2*, “Lord knows, kids like Henry need a hero. Courageous, self-sacrificing people. Setting examples for all of us. Everybody loves a hero. People line up for them, cheer them, scream their names. And years later, they’ll tell how they stood in the rain for hours just to get a glimpse of the one who taught them how to hold on a second longer. I believe there’s a hero in all of us, that keeps us honest, gives us strength, makes us noble, and finally allows us to die with pride, even though sometimes we have to be steady, and give up the thing we want the most. Even our dreams.”

That’s true, and it’s a message that deserves to be heard. I’m glad it’s in *Spider-Man 2*, but moved that it applied just as well to a random group of US citizens. You don’t have to be a superhero or supernatural to be super heroic. We all know that—why do we so rarely see it on film?

I took so long in writing this that I actually did get around to seeing Shyamalan’s *Lady in the Water* at the dollar theater. It could not have been a more perfect parody of inauthentic, Joseph Campbell abusing, self-aggrandizement. The heroes of that movie are a writer (played by M. Night himself) whose underappreciated masterpiece will transform a great leader of the future, and a demoralized doctor who learns to cry. Oh, and a nymph.

The good news is it tanked. The bad news is it did better box office than *United 93*. Way better. Maybe because the audience knew how *United 93* would end and it was too heart rending. Another September 11 movie, *World Trade Center*, focused on a successful rescue and made far more money. Some experts of that day’s events complained that if anything it underreported the heroism displayed by rescuers (I haven’t yet seen the film, I have difficulties with its director Oliver Stone). One of them—a former Marine turned businessman who donned his old uniform (correctly believing it would give him greater access to the site), had a quick meeting with his pastor, then raced to the ruins of the WTC—struck preview audiences as implausible though that was pretty much his story. The man, Dave Karnes, re-enlisted and served a tour Philippeans. Disappointed that he didn’t go to Iraq, he re-upped did seventeen months there. That Stone wants his follow-up movie to be about all those “interesting theories” about the attacks we will explore no further and be grateful that kept them out of this one.

While I would appreciate more heroic stories featuring human beings facing contemporary crises—say, outwitting and foiling terrorists—the *Spider-Man* and *Lord of the Rings* movies among others are wonderfully satisfying. And I am very comfortable with the idea of a generation of kids being raised with Harry Potter and the luckless Baudelaire children. We can’t always control events, but we can aspire to react admirably to them. Maybe our hero films will prove more instructional on planes than the ones with the flight attendants pointing to exits and airbags.



Wigs, wigs, wigs! (Pagona, Chris, Cobra!)

End Nose—A word about the wigs.

Vol. 43 has featured a lot of wigs. Why? Short answer: they rock. Longer answer begins now. I’ve long been tantalized by the idea of having a wig. There are a couple of wig shops near where I used to live in Scottsdale that are always closed, at least when I am near. I would press my nose against the glass (metaphorically, naturally) and sigh and ask Partick how much he reckoned a good wig would go for. Well, one he wore for a shoot cost about \$200. That’s a lot of dough. So I sighed again and put the thought on the shelf.

Last October, the Amazing Amy forwarded an invitation for Frank’s Annual Wig Party. Frank is a lovely person with solid taste in art, though he has an aversion to actually hanging it on his walls. Plus, what an opportunity to get a wig! I called a bunch of shops, and while I got a number of \$200+ wig estimates, but then the prices began to drop. I got a good vibration and a thirty to fifty dollar price range from a store on the west side and grabbed my keys.

I pulled in front of a shop window that had “YOUR PLACE FOR ETHNIC WIGS” painted in huge letters on the window. Although I was pretty sure I wasn’t the ethnicity they had in mind, I entered. The place was manned by an ingratiating Asian woman who owned it and a couple of skeptical looking black shop girls. The Asian woman picked out a wig with black, shoulder length locks and reddish highlights. Then she went in back to yell at some people, and the shop girls took over. After I explained my business there (an alternate identity), they warmed up and became friendly and helpful.

In the end, I bought the wig the Asian woman had selected and got it ready for the wig party with a quick stop at a Greek-fest. At the latter, it was a sensation. The praise was most effusive. References to femme fatales from David Lynch movies made. That gave me a nice little boost of confidence for the wig party, let me tell you what. The only people who knew me were Amy and the host (and he very slightly at that time), so the effect on the gathering wasn’t as dramatic on them. But I was feeling fine and flirting like a soubrette. Unusual behavior for me, but it went better than I would ever have imagined.

So I told Pagona she should mandate wigs for New Year’s Eve party. I got the gorgeous little blond number seen on page two and had a fabulous time.

Wigs are clearly the key to a happy life. Well, mine, anyway, even if my marvelous landlady Roseann worries that I’ll fall into the pool whenever I wear a blond one. Looking less like myself has enabled me to be more like the person I wished to be. And if that means I get the occasional inquiry about being a drag queen or cancer patient, it’s well worthwhile.

‘Till next time and please forgive me for not giving you your proper due in this issue (I’m looking at you Janet and Barbara and Auntie Jan among many, many others).