Shoemaker Village

Volume 24 - December 1998

SHOEMAKER VILLAGE RETURNS AFTER NUMEROUS DELAYS! HOLIDAY BONUS ISSUE FINALLY PUBLISHED!



News Blowout! 20+ pages of news:
RORVIKS VANDALIZE NEIGHBORHOOD
PIONEER ROAD COMPLETED
FALL FOLIAGE REPORT
UNUSUAL WEATHER CONTINUES!

The Knights of the Square Table continues after Mike's capture!





PLUS!
Expanded Discussion Forum this month!
Huge Short Stories section included!
1998: The Year in Review featured inside!

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Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Welcome back to all of our subscribers! Although you may have missed the *Village* over the past few months, we hope that this bonus issue will more than make up for that loss!

To begin, you have noticed that the *Village* has been absent for the past few months. There were many factors involved in the cancellation of the October and November issues; however, by far the chief issue in the decision was our inability to gain access to a zip drive. When the *Village* computer broke for the first time, all of the *Village* files were copied on to high-density (100 MB) zip disks in a hurry to copy files off the system before it crashed. During the time that the computer was unavailable, we could not locate a zip drive to copy crucial *Village* files, such as *The Knights of the Square Table,* to a regular, low-density disk. Although we sent out numerous E-Mails to our subscribers, none of them had a zip drive that we were able to use to copy these files. Ironically, after the computer was returned, it broke again, this time because the low-density drive was jammed. The same problem resulted, forcing the cancellation of these issues.

Since we have not had an issue in over two months, we decided to come back with a bang and publish a super bonus issue for our subscribers' benefit. This issue contains 43 pages of exciting articles. Below, you will find a breakdown of the contents of this issue.

The Neighborhood News, which is usually published every month, was also discontinued during the subscription; however, both times the section was written without any way to publish it. Consequently we have decided to publish **all three** of these sections instead of postponing the *Village* yet again to merge them into one large section. This would have taken much time and effort, and we decided that most subscribers would be interested in reading the past news anyway. We have also included a special report on the Rorviks' children, who caused damage to the neighborhood in September. Be sure to check this section out!

Last year, as many of you may remember, we published the popular *1997: Year In Review* section. Because of the popularity of this insert, we decided to make a reprise and publish *1998: The Year in Review* this year. We are proud to say that this section is even larger than last year's because of the full year of news that was included.

The Discussion Forum, which has been plagued in prior issues by a lack of contributions, has returned in full swing this month. The topic for December is the holidays (what else?), so be sure to hear contributors' viewpoints on this.

This month's short stories section was expected to be nothing but huge, but, unfortunately, we have again fallen victim to lack of contributions. This is now a call to our readers: please consider contributing a story to the *Village*! We hope that, in February, with the extra time, we will be able to bring you an expanded short stories section, so continue reading!

Of course, no issue would be complete without *The Knights of the Square Table*, and this month is no exception. During this installment, the group infiltrates an enemy camp and rescues their friend, who was captured during the last issue. In case you missed out on the early installments of *The Knights of the Square Table*, check out the *Village* webpages at **http://come.to/ShoemakerVillage** to catch up.

Speaking of the webpages, we would like to announce formally that the pages have been reconstructed once again. This time, they boast a much easier interface, and the Java applets that crashed many visitors' browsers to the pages have been removed. In addition, the Neighborhood News section is published online as soon as it is completed (which may be one to two weeks before the *Village* is published on paper). The pages are updated every Thursday night, so go and pay a visit.

Thank you for your continuing support of the *Village*! As usual, because of the Christmas holidays, there will be no January issue of the *Village*, but we hope to return in February with another bonus issue! Enjoy, and happy holidays!

Acknowledgments

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The next issue of *Shoemaker Village* will be published on Friday, January 29, 1999.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Tuesday, January 26, 1999.

Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**

February 1999: *Tough Teachers: Helpful or Detrimental?*
March 1999: Are people becoming lazier?
April 1999: What are your expectations for the upcoming baseball season?

Coming Next Issue

Volume 24 - February 1999

Read the recap on the Christmas holidays! Be sure not to miss what happened in the neighborhood during that time!
The Annual February Bonus issue is coming! Lots of news, editorials, novels, and stories!
The Discussion Forum is growing! Don't miss the chance to voice your opinion on tough teachers!
The Knights of the Square Table continues!
Lots of news, stories, articles, and more!

ALL IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF *SHOEMAKER VILLAGE*!

Puzzle Page

N	H	C	H	W	H	G	I	E	L	S	L	L	E	B
T	O	H	H	I	T	I	N	S	E	L	V	E	S	D
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K	N	G	H	A	R	O	N	I	M	D	T	S	I	Z
B	C	X	X	E	G	N	O	E	L	A	N	K	L	W
P	A	C	M	G	Z	N	W	R	E	A	T	H	O	X
R	Z	T	M	M	N	J	V	N	L	B	C	N	H	Q

Words

Bells
Candle
Carol
Chimney
Christmas
Claus
December
Decoration
Dreidel
Elves
Family
Gift
Green
Hanukkah
Holidays
Holly
Lights
Merry
Minorah
Noel
North Pole
Ornament
Present
Red
Reindeer
Santa
Sleigh
Snow
Spirit
Star
Stocking
Tinsel
Tree
Vacation
Wreath
Winter

Neighborhood News
October 1998

Rorviks Vandalize Neighborhood

A *Shoemaker Village* special report

On the night that it all started, Saturday, September 12, 1998, neighbor Henry Sokolowski was in a happy mood. He had just seen his wife's sister's son get married and he returned home expecting to have a quiet night. But the night was anything but quiet.

When he arrived home, he found the driveway littered with tomatoes, leaves, and a strange grey box.

Jean Sokolowski, his wife, first saw the debris through the window of her car. When she stepped out, her first reaction was "What happened here? Was there another storm?"



Arriving home, Jean Sokolowski was greeted with destruction.

Less than a minute later, Christopher, her son, discovered that the damage caused was far from that of a storm.

Looking around, he found tomatoes, red and green, smashed around the driveway. Leaves that had been raked and bagged the day before were thrown around the mailbox, the bag shredded in pieces. A hose was lying far from the faucet, dripping. The laundry room entryway was littered with pieces of plants and screens that had been erected around them to protect them from the Rorviks' goat. Wood lay on top of Henry's pool cover. Pieces of pepper plants lay around the garden, and a lone orange pepper lay smashed in the middle of it all.

Because it was dark, an accurate assessment of the damage caused could not be taken at that time. The picture in the previous column was lightened with the help of technology, and, as you can see, the damage was extensive.



This box was discovered shortly after the vandalism, containing toys and paper full of obscenities.

After Christopher took a quick tour of the property with his father, they returned to the driveway where Jean was looking with anger at her damaged tomato plants. It was not until then that they discovered the condemning evidence.

When Henry opened the box, he was relieved to find that it only contained toys. But upon closer inspection, he found slips of paper attached to them, scribbled with misspelled words and obscenities, as shown above. (The red parts of this picture have been deleted so as not to offend some of our sensitive readers.) The handwriting was found to be that of the Rorviks' children, Jason and Thore.

This was enough to convince Henry to call the Rorviks. However, as he entered the house, he heard the answering machine beeping. "Go and look at it first," said Christopher. Sure enough, there was a message from neighbor Pat Altimari, informing Henry that she had seen the Rorvik boys climbing a tree in his front yard.

"I saw the Rorviks, the little kids, in the yard, climbing in the tree. I just wanted to let you know. They also left the hose running on your landscaping," one part of the message read.

It is suspected that the misdeeds occurred between 6:00 and 9:30 PM, because Pat was away during that time. When she turned the hose off, she reportedly did not see the other side of the house.

After hearing the message, Henry phoned the Rorviks, but the phone number had been disconnected. After calling directory assistance, Henry discovered the new number.

"I was mad," he said. "I didn't care what happened, so I called him and woke him up." Later, Einar Rorvik, Sr. paid a visit to Henry while he was standing in the driveway.

Henry reports that Einar was unresponsive during the encounter, blaming problems on the neighborhood.

After Einar left, Henry called the police. Reportedly the person who answered the phone at the police station said in an uninterested voice, "Oh. We'll send an officer right away."

After showing the officer the damage, having him listen to the answering machine message, and telling him about the strange box, Henry set out to clean up his property and did not finish until 3:00 that morning.

The next day, Chris Rorvik brought her two youngest sons to the Sokolowski house to apologize. "That was at least humane," said Henry. "Their dad sure wasn't acting civil last night!"

That night, after the apology, the police officer to whom Henry had spoken the night before returned to talk to the Rorviks, but the outcome of this conversation is unknown.

UPPER MORELAND TEACHERS STRIKE, STUDENTS OUTRAGED

On Wednesday, September 8, 1998, the Upper Moreland Education Association officially announced that they would go on strike.

This came to the dismay of many students, who had been hoping to get on with the school year and were tired of the summer. This viewpoint, however, was not shared by neighbor Tony Hoffman, who, when asked by the Montgomery County *Record*, replied that he was glad that there was a strike because "I could stay out late with my friends".

The strike, which lasted for 13 days, was so long that a separate education program for 12th graders had to be implemented in order for them to graduate on the scheduled day. Details of this are sketchy, but at the current time, it is not believed that those students will have to make up the missed days.

For 1st through 11th grade, teachers aren't optimistic. Because **eight** days of school were missed, it is likely that students will have to attend school to make up for the loss of those days.

This causes a problem, because, as printed earlier, the coming Winter is expected to be harsh, unlike the past two years when there were no snow days. Four snow days were "built" into the calender and are usually given back to the students at the end of the year, but what happens to those days is still to be seen.

We will keep you posted on the latest developments of this important story.

PIONEER ROAD RECONSTRUCTION CONTINUES

Throughout the month of September, road crews worked feverishly to complete the reconstruction of Pioneer Road before their deadline in late October.



Partially obscured by the trees, these vehicles tore up the road.

The photo to the left depicts the construction workers digging up the road to install new curbing early in September. Last month, township manager Brian Mook announced that the reconstruction was behind schedule and would be completed before the end of October, instead of the date originally planned: Before school began.

Several of the neighbors doubt that the construction will be done even before the new due date. According to the current schedule, it doesn't look that way either.

During five weekdays of the two weeks, we observed, no road work was done at all. There was no apparent reason for this. On one day, it rained, but the other days were perfectly fine. On the days they did work, they arrived at

around 7:00 and were never observed working after 3:00 p.



Workers took a lunch break behind the Road Closed signs.

m.. On both Saturdays the contractors arrived before 6:30 and began noisy construction work, waking neighbors out of bed.

Neighbor Jean Sokolowski sums up the state of the construction in her comment, "What's taking them so long?"

Neighborhood News

November 1998

UNUSUALLY WARM WEATHER AFFECTS NEIGHBORHOOD

The month of October was unusually warm for the area, bringing unexpected growth to vegetation and pleasure to many faces in the neighborhood.

The flowers in the photo to the right belong to neighbor Jean Sokolowski. "Normally, these types of flowers reach a quarter or half this size," Jean said. "But because of the warm weather late in the season, they were able to keep growing until the beginning of November!" Other neighbors had similar success. The pepper on the left, taken from Jean's garden, measured 8 inches high and almost 4 inches in diameter. The hand at the top of the picture has been left in to let you see actually how big the pepper was.



Jean Sokolowski's flowers were her largest in years.



Jean Sokolowski's prized pepper.

Although it was expected in the area that trees would lose their leaves two to three weeks earlier because of the severe drought that wrought the area over the summer, this did not occur, to the surprise of many, presumably due to the heat wave in the beginning of October where the temperature reached seventy degrees for five days in a row. Next month, we will report on how the foliage on the trees fared and if it lived up to expectations.

As reported earlier, this winter is also expected to be abnormal, due to the phenomenon known as La Nina. The opposite of El Nino, this causes waters in the Pacific to cool, bringing cooler weather to the area. Although last year there was only eight inches of snow, this year's total is expected to meet or exceed the average of 40 inches.

We'll be sure to keep you informed of the latest reports and predictions.

PIONEER ROAD CONSTRUCTION NEARS COMPLETION, TAKES DANGEROUS TURN



This showed Pioneer Road in early October, just before it was repaved.

Pioneer Road is nearing completion, and there are many results to the construction project: good and bad, but some just plain dangerous.

On Saturday, October 24, the road was paved over to finally fix the potholes that littered the street for years before. However, "This is not the final coat," said a neighbor. "They still have to pave it over with more asphalt."



Henry Sokolowski cuts his lawn as the dust flies.

In addition, on the previous Saturday, conditions in the area turned dangerous. Dust had been piling up on cars and windows for months before during the spring and summer, because the area had been without rain for four weeks. This, coupled with the contractors' slow work on the road, enveloped the area with dust during the later part of the week of October 11.

"I never put my screen door in," commented Tim Hoffman one day. "The dust was ridiculous." When, on October 31, Henry

Sokolowski washed off his screens that he had just recently taken out of his windows, dust flowed from them. "I've never seen the side of the house so dirty," he said.

On the last day of the drought, Henry was cutting his lawn. As you can see in the picture above, dust spewed from the lawnmower, which his son, Christopher, usually operates. "I stopped," Christopher said. "I would have had to wear a mask to keep from choking on the dust!" There was so much dust that day that, when the drought ended ten minutes after Henry had finished, water spots were visible where each drop of the light drizzle fell.

In a statement made in early September, township manager Brian Mook assured us that the road would be completed by the end of October. However, at the time this article was written, the road is still awaiting its final coat in the area in front of the neighborhood.

Hopefully, the dust has finally cleared, and the construction will be done soon.

STRIKE RESULTS IN MAKE-UP DAYS, STUDENTS UNHAPPY

In September, the Upper Moreland Education Association went on strike for nine days. It was surmised long before the strike even began that there would be days that would have to be made up later in the year. Now, it is known for sure what these days are and most students aren't happy.

The revised school calendar was made available in late October, when a math teacher at UMHS off-handedly commented on if she would be seeing her students on the vacation days. The calendar wasn't "formally" released for several days afterward.

The days to be made up include December 28, 29, and 30 (Christmas holidays), February 15 (President's Day), and March 29 and 30 (Easter holidays).

Needless to say, most people are not happy with the change. One *Village* staff person commented, "There's two months of summer vacation that they could take these days off. Just extend the school year an extra week. Instead, the school board reinstates the days during the Christmas and Easter holidays. Do you think that students will be concentrating during that time?"

"If people value education, they will attend these days," said Mrs. Mary-Sue Hoffman, a neighbor and teacher at UMHS. "Those parents that let their students stay home during [the Christmas vacation make-up days] are only hurting their children." Her son, Tony, continued to argue with her afterward.

"I'm going to be the only one home for most of the holidays," Henry Sokolowski, who was mentioned in the previous article, recently said. "I have all this vacation time that I saved for the end of the year and nobody will be home! During the day that the calendar changes were announced, several students started attempting to convince others not to attend school during these days. This, however, quickly fell apart.

In addition to the make-up days, any snow days will be made up during the Easter break. Since the coming winter is expected to be harsh, this may make matters worse than they already are.

We'll keep you updated on the latest news on these days next month.

Neighborhood News

December 1998

WARM WEATHER CONTINUES, FORECASTERS WORRIED

The unusually warm weather has continued during the month of November and early December, worrying many neighborhood residents.

Trees began to bloom on Monday, December 7, as a two-week long hot streak came to an end. During those two weeks, the temperature reached above seventy degrees, smashing records, including an all-time record for December, now at 73 degrees.

The weather caused unusual effects on

nature in the neighborhood. One unprecedented effect is that foliage, especially low bushes, has been fooled into blooming and opening leaves, thinking that it is spring.

Although this may not cause any problems in the short run, as they will just lose their leaves again when it gets cold, the effect it will have next year remains to be seen. Most trees and bushes develop their new leaves during the late fall and early winter inside their bark. When it gets warm, these leaves simply expand outward and began to grow. However, if the leaves fall off in the fall for a second time, it is unlikely that the tree or bush will bloom again during the next year. Since most trees have stored energy that allows them to survive for 5 years without leaves, there is likely to be no ill effects except for a few bushes and trees that do not grow leaves next year.

During the summer, many forecasters had predicted that this winter would be the worst one in years, due to the cooling of the Pacific Ocean waters known as La Niña. However, the El Niño phenomenon, which brought no measurable snow to the area last year, did not dissipate as early as it was thought.

As of the current time, meteorologists are now predicting a warmer and dryer winter than normal, continuing a trend that has been underway for the past six months. This is because the La Niña phenomenon has not formed as they had thought it would.

What does this mean for the neighborhood? Expect very little snow again this winter, for the third year in a row. We'll keep you informed of changing weather patterns in later issues as well as the 1999-2000 winter weather outlook as soon as it is available in early March.

PIONEER ROAD RECONSTRUCTION FINALLY COMPLETED

On December 1, 1998, after the final portion of road was paved over, the Pioneer Road project has now been considered "officially" completed. This comes to the delight of a neighborhood that has dealt with construction-related problems over the past year.

Although the Pioneer-Davisville intersection still remains to be finished, this as well is almost completed and, compared to the rest of the road, can be considered insignificant.

For a full review of the history of the reconstruction project, see the special *1998: The Year in Review* section that is included following this section.

The end of the construction was greeted with cheers by many neighbors. Jean Sokolowski, who complained of her commute time, which was lengthened during the construction period, was pleased. "Now I can get to work in half the time! I'm so glad that they're **finally** done!"

During the past month, final work took place, which included finishing the top coat of the road and partially fixing the Pioneer-Davisville intersection. This part of the construction has not been finished as of yet. Although the reason is not known, one of our readers suggested that the intersection may be finished in the Spring.

The project, which entailed installing new sewer pipes, grading the road to allow drainage, installing new drains, installing curbing in the road, widening the road, expanding the view of the two intersections, patching, and paving the road took an estimated 8 months and 9 days from start to finish.

FALL FOLIAGE REPORT

In September, we first thought of including a Fall Foliage section in the *Village* this month. Below are pictures of trees that we found to be the most colorful in the area. Unfortunately, the film that we had been using did not reveal the true beauty of the trees (some of the pictures are slightly dull). In addition, we ran out of film in the middle of the season and were not able to secure any more until the beginning of December. In spite of all the difficulties, we have posted five of the best trees below. Enjoy.



These glowing trees made it seem as if the sun were shining, even on cloudy days.



This tall maple in front of the Spiecker's house attracted everyone's attention.



This tree, located in the yard of Pat and Bob Altimari, shone brilliantly in the early morning sun.



Located in the Hoffmans' yard, this maple tree lit up the neighborhood on cloudy days.

HALLOWEEN RESULTS

Halloween was enjoyed by most in the development, though trick-or-treating turnout was lower than usual.


These pumpkins decorated the neighborhood on Halloween night.

This seems to be part of a declining trend that has typified many of the past few Halloweens. Each year, there have been fewer trick-or-treaters than the one before, bottoming out this year at less than fifty in the entire night, on average.

Neighbor Stephen Sokolowski, who camped out at his family's door on Halloween night to scare people, reported that he sat unfruitfully outside for hours to scare only two people.

"When I went outside," he said, "people were coming around. But after that, there were maybe two people for the rest of the night! This is disappointing!" For more information, read the Discussion Forum article entitled *Stores, School, and the Christmas Eve Luminaria*.

We hope that next year, people won't just give up on Halloween altogether!

OTHER NEWS TIDBITS

-The Christmas Eve Luminaria, which has not been held for two years, is expected to be absent again this year as no information has been distributed. As you may recall, the Luminaria consisted of lighted bags lining the street and was organized by Pat and Bob Altimari.

UM HOOPS plans to kick off its season on Saturday, December 12, in its Opening Day Ceremonies. According to the president of the league, enrollment is down this year, but a good season is still expected. We wish the best of luck to all of its participants.

The "guy across the street" from the neighborhood has again decorated his house for Christmas, following tradition. There was some speculation in recent months as to if this would occur because two of his Disney characters were stolen last year.

Going to the Dogz

AUBREY ATTACKS!

Aubrey, the Spiecker's dog, recently ran after neighbor Stephen Sokolowski after escaping from his chain.

The incident happened in mid-October, when Henry Sokolowski was fixing some electrical cords on the exterior of his house. Matt Spiecker, who cares for Aubrey, lost control of the dog's leash, and the dog sprinted away.

Christopher Sokolowski, who was standing behind a bush when it happened, was caught off guard. "Get that thing away from me," he fearfully screamed, and managed to rush inside his family's garage. The dog then turned its attention to Stephen, who, for two long minutes, managed to keep himself safe by standing on a windowsill.

Henry, who was on the ground at the time, yelled, "What's going on? Shoo! Shoo! He just ran through the bushes! Matt, get your dog out of here!"

The Spiecker's son promptly responded, controlling Aubrey and leading her away, leaving a shaken up family behind. "I was afraid that the dog was going to bite me!" Stephen exclaimed later. "I hate when these dogs get loose! I'm always afraid that a dog is going to sneak up on me!"

Whatever the case, we sincerely hope that this will be the last animal attack for a long time.

Humor from the Village Square

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the comedy section this month.

THE WIT OF STEVEN WRIGHT

1. Last night I played a blank tape at full blast. The mime next door went nuts.

2. If a person with multiple personalities threatens suicide, is that considered a hostage situation?

3. Just think how much deeper the ocean would be if sponges didn't live there.

4. If a cow laughed, would milk come out her nose?

5. Whatever happened to Preparations A through G?

6. If olive oil comes from olives, where does baby oil come from?

7. I went for a walk last night, and my kids asked me how long I'd be gone. I said, "The whole time."

8. So what's the speed of dark?

9. How come you don't ever hear about gruntled employees? And who has been diss-ing them anyhow?

10. After eating, do amphibians need to wait an hour before getting OUT of the water?

11. Why don't they just make mouse-flavored cat food?

12. If you're sending someone some Styrofoam, what do you pack it in?

13. I just got skylights put in my place. The people who live above me are furious.

14. Why do they sterilize needles for lethal injections?

15. Do they have reserved parking for non-handicapped people at the special Olympics?

16. Is it true that cannibals don't eat clowns because they taste funny?

17. When a man talks dirty to a woman, it's sexual harassment. When a woman talks dirty to a man, it's $3.95 per minute.

18. If it's tourist season, why can't we shoot them?

19. Isn't Disney World a people trap operated by a mouse?

20. Whose cruel idea was it for the word "lisp" to have an "s" in it?

21. Since light travels faster than sound, isn't that why some people appear bright until you hear them speak?

22. How come abbreviated is such a long word?

23. If it's zero degrees outside today and it's supposed to be twice as cold tomorrow, how cold is it going to be?

24. Why do you press harder on a remote-control when you know the battery is dead?

25. Since Americans throw rice at weddings, do Asians throw hamburgers?

26. Why are they called buildings, when they're already finished? Shouldn't they be called builts?

27. Why are they called apartments, when they're all stuck together?

28. Why do banks charge you a "non-sufficient funds fee" on money they already know you don't have?

29. If the universe is everything, and scientists say that the universe is expanding, what is it expanding into?

30. If you got into a taxi and the driver started driving backward, would the taxi driver end up owing you money?

31. What would a chair look like if your knees bent the other way?

32. If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to see it, do the other trees make fun of it?

33. Why is a carrot more orange than an orange?

34. When two airplanes almost collide why do they call it a near miss? It sounds like a near hit to me!

35. Do fish get cramps after eating?

36. Why are there 5 syllables in the word “monosyllabic”?

37. Why do they call it the Department of Interior when they are in charge of everything outdoors?

38. Why do scientists call it research when looking for something new?

39. If vegetarians eat vegetables, what do humanitarians eat?

40. When I erase a word with a pencil, where does it go?

41. Why is it, when a door is open it's ajar, but when a jar is open, it's not a door?

42. Tell a man that there are 400 billion stars and he'll believe you. Tell him a bench has wet paint and he has to touch it.

43. How come Superman could stop bullets with his chest, but always ducked when someone threw a gun at him?

44. If “con” is the opposite of “pro,” then what is the opposite of progress?

45. Why is it lemon juice contains mostly artificial ingredients, but dishwashing liquid contains real lemons?

46. Why buy a product that it takes 2000 flushes to get rid of?

47. Why do we wait until a pig is dead to “cure” it?

48. Why do we wash bath towels? Aren't we clean when we use them?

49. Why do we put suits in a garment bag and put garments in a suitcase?

50. Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle?

51. Do Roman paramedics refer to IV's as “4's”?

52. What do little birdies see when they get knocked unconscious?

53. Why doesn't Tarzan have a beard?

54. If man evolved from monkeys and apes, why do we still have monkeys and apes?

55. Should you trust a stockbroker who's married to a travel agent?

56. Is boneless chicken considered to be an invertebrate?

57. Do married people live longer than single people, or does it just SEEM longer?

58. I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, “Where's the self-help section?” She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

59. If all those psychics know the winning lottery numbers, why are they all still working?

60. Isn't the best way to save face to keep the lower part shut?

61. War doesn't determine who's right, just who's left.

ASSORTED STORIES

Two gas company servicemen, a senior training supervisor and a young trainee were out checking meters in a suburban neighborhood. They parked their truck at the end of the alley and worked their way to the other end. At the last house a woman looking out her kitchen window watched the two men as they checked her gas meter.

Finishing the meter check, the senior supervisor challenged his younger coworker to a footrace down the alley back to the truck to prove that an older guy could outrun a younger one.

As they came running up to the truck, they realized the lady from that last house was huffing and puffing right behind them. They stopped and asked her what was wrong.

Gasping for breath, she replied, “When I see two gas men running as hard as you two were, I figured I'd better run too!”

Two guys are walking through the woods and come across a big deep hole. “Wow! That looks deep.” “Sure does. Toss a few pebbles in there and see how deep it is.” They pick up a few pebbles and throw them in and wait. No noise. “Jeeez. That is REALLY deep. Here. Throw one of these great big rocks down there. Those should make a noise.” They pick up a couple of football-sized rocks and toss them into the hole and wait...and wait. Nothing. They look at each other in amazement. One gets a determined look on his face and says, “Hey! Over here in the weeds. There's a railroad tie. Help me carry it. When we toss it in, it’s GOTTA make some noise.” The two drag the heavy tie over to the hole and heave it in. Not a sound comes from the hole. Suddenly, out of the nearby woods, a goat appears, running like the wind. It rushes toward the two men, then right past them, running as fast as its legs will carry it. Suddenly it leaps in the air and into the hole.

The two men are astonished with what they've just seen. Then, out of the woods comes a farmer who spots the men and ambles over. “Hey! You two guys seen my goat out here?” “You bet we did! Craziest thing I ever seen. It came running like crazy and just jumped into this hole!” “Nah,” says the farmer. “That couldn't have been MY goat. My goat was chained to a railroad tie.”

One day a lunatic man was jumping up and down on a manhole cover screaming at the top of his lungs, “Seventeen!! Seventeen!!” Intrigued by the man's insane behavior, another man walks over to him and asks why he is doing that. The crazy man responded, “It's a blast. You have to try it. Jump as high as you can and scream 'Seventeen!! as loud as humanly possible. You get such a rush. Try it.” Reluctantly, the second man gets on the manhole cover and barely hops and says, “Seventeen?” very timidly. The insane man says, “No, no, no. You're doing it wrong. Jump higher. Yell louder.” So, the second man begins jumping a little higher and speaking louder than normal. Finally he says, “Hey, you know, I am getting a little bit of a rush. Seventeen!! Seventeen!!” The man jumps higher and higher, screaming louder and louder. The first man, once the second had jumped high enough, yanked the manhole cover out from under the second, causing him to fall to his death. The original man replaced the cover and, once again, began jumping and screaming, “Eighteen!! Eighteen!!”

MORE HEADLINES

- Red Tape Holds Up New Bridge

- Deer Kill 17,000
- Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead

- Man Struck by Lightning Faces Battery Charge

- New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group

- Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft

- Kids Make Nutritious Snacks

- Chef Throws His Heart into Helping Feed Needy

- Arson Suspect is Held in Massachusetts Fire

- British Union Finds Dwarfs in Short Supply

- Lansing Residents Can Drop Off Trees

- Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half

- New Vaccine May Contain Rabies

- Man Minus Ear Waives Hearing

- Deaf College Opens Doors to Hearing

- Air Head Fired

- Steals Clock, Faces Time

- Prosecutor Releases Probe into Undersheriff

- Old School Pillars are Replaced by Alumni

- Bank Drive-in Window Blocked by Board

- Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors

Stores, School, and the Christmas Eve Luminaria

With the holidays upon us, we at the Village decided that a good topic for the Discussion Forum would be the Holidays. Since this topic is so general, I found many things I would like to comment on.

One thing that disturbs me is how stores begin selling Christmas decorations months before Christmas. For example, last year the Strathman's store in Southampton (across from OLGC church) displayed wire reindeer in front of the store in the beginning of October. It may be that I am the only person who feels this way, but it seems that a store who has to place their merchandise outside their store three months in advance must be hard pressed for business, and this doesn't send a good message to their customers. I also don't know who would want to buy Christmas reindeer in the beginning of October to store them for a long time before Christmas when they could buy them on December 26 for the next year at half price.

Something else that I find interesting is how the concept of the holidays has grown over the past few years. Christmas decorations are put up earlier and earlier and left up later. Also included in this trend is the fact that many neighbors seem to be decorating their houses more and more. Christmas seems as if it has replaced Halloween (or any other holiday) in its value. During this Halloween, I staked out my family's front door and scared trick-or-treaters. I can remember when, at least 5 years ago, there would be at least one group a minute coming to the door for candy (not that I was there to observe). This year, I would be over exaggerating if I said that there were thirty kids who visited the house the entire night.

One thing that has turned into a major disappointment is the Christmas Eve Luminaria, which Pat and Bob Altimari had to cancel one year when Bob was ill. Although many neighbors feel that it was a great tradition while it lasted, no one volunteered to continue the tradition when the Altimaris couldn’t. Hopefully, somebody will continue this great tradition in the future (hint, hint!), as it was enjoyed by many, including the many cars who, on their travels on Christmas Eve, rounded the

development to see the bags lining the street and the lights of the “guy across the street” on Pioneer Road.

Of course, another disappointment this year for Christmas is the reduced vacation time that has been given to Upper Moreland students. While most years, on average, this time would amount to about a week and two days, this year there are only four days to have off: Christmas Eve and day, and New Year's Eve and day. This, to put it plainly, is an outrage. I understand that the teachers had to strike and that the days have to be made up, but there is three months of “boring” (thank you to Christopher Sokolowski for this quote) summer vacation to add to. I know that by the end of the summer, I was tired of vacation, and Christopher Sokolowski, as I was told, was “bouncing off the walls” (quote by Jean Sokolowski). This year, school is over on June 18, even earlier than last year. Since UM schools always attend school later than other districts, it wouldn't hurt to extend the school year until June 23 (the fourth Wednesday in June). I'm sure that most students would agree that this is much better than attending school between Christmas and New Year's, but the administrators never really listen to students’ ideas (even though these are in their “best interest”), so this will never happen. (A better idea would just be to give the students off the entire two or three weeks off when they need a break from the homework and extend the school year even more, but that’s another topic all together.)

As you can see, there are many things that need to be changed in regard to the holiday season. Remember, it is only with the help of you that things can be changed. It seems appropriate here that one of Newton’s laws be modified: “If something is changing, it tends to continue changing, but if it is static, it will remain the same.” If you have any ideas or comments on this piece or any other that is published in any issue, be sure to send them in and we’ll print your views on the subject.

The Holidays

I think that the holidays are the best time of the year. All of the happiness and cheer that is shown toward people really signifies good will toward your fellow man. A big question is why can't we feel this way all year round? It really pains me to see the way people are treated on the streets all the time. All you hear about is murder, rape, arson, and other types of crimes committed. Even around the holidays, that kind of behavior still happens. If there could be eternal peace throughout the world, I, along with a lot of other people, would be overjoyed at the idea.

We also have to look at the good things that the holidays bring us. The holidays are a time when we can spend time with our families, some members we only see once or twice in the whole year. The songs that are sung and presents that are given out are so wonderful to see. What really touches my heart is when you see people of all ages donating their time and money to worthy charities. Putting other people before themselves shows a lot of character and dignity. I can say that I do those types of activities all year round. Last summer, I went down to West Virginia to rehabilitate low-income housing. It was a very rewarding experience, one that I will never forget.

Holidays are another time when we may miss friends and family that may go to war. They may be gone for such a long time, especially over Hanukkah, Christmas, and the new year. We don't know if and when they will come home. If they come home, they may be dead. Those are times you may want to not even think about it if it hasn't happened to anybody in your family. In conclusion, holidays are a joyous time that we get to spend with the people we love and care for the most.

Family and the Holidays

Well, it's that time of year again. I know that whole, "what are the holidays really about?" thing is getting old but I haven't put in my two cents yet. So the world is just going to have to stop while I have my say.

It's really hard to focus on the true meaning of the holidays is. Despite my upbringing, I'm not very religious. I feel all warm and squishy during Christmas but I don't think it's God working through me. I'm not *completely* hung up on presents either. Oh yeah, and the "peace to all" and "love and joy to everyone," etc. stuff is completely lost on me. I don't know about you, but my house is anything but calm and peaceful around Christmas. I don't think anyone can honestly say that they or someone they know aren't exceedingly stressed out at this time of the year. I could probably write a term paper on why, but that'll have to wait. When I think of the holidays, there's one thing I can't help but think of family.

Just a couple years ago, I couldn't stand being with relatives but now it's almost fun. There's something safe and familiar about being surrounded by those I tolerate...I mean love. I really can't explain why, but I certainly have a new appreciation for family togetherness. Sometimes it's a hassle, and I won't say I still don't complain about the annual trips to New Jersey or wherever the gathering is being held, but I don't feel as awkward as I used to around family.

I guess the point is, don't ever take your family for granted. They could be the single greatest people with whom you'll ever come in contact. Yes, they can be annoying, and loud, and smelly, and never leave well enough alone, and constantly question you...but they always mean well. Make the most of time spent with them.

Oh yeah...sometimes they give you money....

The Most Memorable Thanksgiving Ever

by Matthew Care

I needed this vacation bad! School wasn't going so well and I had a lot of work to do around the bed. Wednesday was a joke-day in school. Shortened periods and a stupid, very loud, all school "pep rally" at the end of the day. When school was over, I had to stay for a prior engagement. It didn't take nearly as long as I expected and I was home by 3:15. I ran down to the mall and got a haircut. When I got home, it wasn't long before I was being hounded for my bags. Some time that evening, not too much later, my sister got home from college. I finished packing in between helping to load up the car and getting a shower. At about quarter of 7, my sister and I drove out to pick up some pizza. Everything was ready to go by 10:00. My parents went to sleep and my sister and I stayed up. Just before midnight, my parents woke up and we drove off under cover of night. We thought by leaving in the middle of the night we'd avoid traffic. This turned out to be correct. As we were driving on the NJ turnpike, we heard on the radio that, amazingly, at that time of night, there was a **4-mile backup!** Fortunately, it was in the other direction. There isn't that much to say about the trip itself. I slept a lot and 300-400 miles later, we arrived in coastal Massachusetts. While there, we did one of the most possibly patriotic things we could have done. We saw Plymouth Rock on Thanksgiving! Luckily, we got there at 7:30 in the morning, hours before the thousands of other people waiting to see it would get there.

After that we drove the little remaining distance to my aunt and uncle's house. It was still kind of early so we didn't honk the horn or anything but they knew we were there. They came outside and helped us unpack the car, which, I must say, we did rather efficiently.

There was something extra special about the trip. This was the first time any of us had seen the house. They had moved there in April of this year, but we'd never made the trip before. I was the only one who'd been there before. On a past trip to New Hampshire (ya know, the ones I'm so fond of writing about) we stopped by the property, but that's all it was at the time--property. It was still under

construction. I walked through the ghostly rooms of the house-to-be and knew I wouldn't be back there for a while. When I got to see it again, it was pretty cool. I re-examined everything, thinking to myself things like, "I remember walking up these stairs," and "oh, there wasn't a toilet here."

It wasn't long before we were settled in and I was raiding the kitchen for food. We had a nice simple breakfast and waited for the rest of those attending to wake up. Still to do so were my grandmother who started the trip from Baltimore and arrived about a week before us, and my cousin and her boyfriend who lived only about an hour away. After breakfast was over (it didn't really matter because I didn't really stop eating all day), my parents took a nap upstairs. The other men fussed with the TV that, it seemed to me, must not have been used since they moved in. The cable was supposedly shut off, but when all the wires were plugged in where they were supposed to go, on came the cable, and, most importantly, a football game, as Thanksgiving demands. After at least an hour of hogging my grandmother to herself, even my sister took a nap on the couch. Maybe I should have been tired, but I can honestly say I wasn't. The only problem with this was I think I was in the way.

Regardless of how old I *thought* I was, I was still the youngest person there and I think the adults felt they were obligated to entertain me. All I really wanted was to just lounge around and occasionally (often) pick food from bounty being prepared in the kitchen. Maybe that's why they wanted to keep me busy. It was decided that we were going to have a little *Othello* tournament. Anyone who's ever played knows it's an exceedingly long game. First I played my cousin's boyfriend. After I lost, I played my uncle. Even though I lost, and even though I felt as if I were being babysat, I won't say I didn't enjoy it. Then both my winning opponents faced each other in a game. This was very interesting because they both became so involved in it. The game doesn't require a lot, if any, verbal communication. They simply sat there staring at the board, *seemingly* oblivious to the rest of the world. Granted, there wasn't much else to notice. If the house were a small town, there would have been crowds of silent spectators watching them pursue their championship because it was the most exciting thing going on. As the afternoon rolled on, the weather seemed to get drearier. A large part of

that day is a blur. At some point I helped set the table for dinner. When my parents woke up, I resisted fatigue for some time but eventually I went upstairs and crashed on their bed. When I woke up, err, was woken up, I was told dinner was almost ready. Very hungry, I raced downstairs. The person who lied to me shall remain anonymous. I crashed once again on the couch. When supper was really ready, I got up and woke my sister. When she woke up, she had some sort of vegetable in her ear. I don't remember exactly what it was that we stuck in there...possibly a squash stem or some sort of herb.

Dinner was incredible! All the leaves were put in the table and it was now 12 feet long, seating 9 people. There was barely enough room for the place settings with all the food. There were stuffing and mashed potatoes and squash and green bean casserole and two kinds of cranberry sauce and three kinds of rolls and corn and yams and spinach and, of course, a BIG turkey. I had a glass of one type of wine. When that bottle was empty, another was opened. Trying a glass of that as well, I didn't like it as much and I believe my aunt finished it. I think I at least tried some of everything, but I never went back for anything more than seconds, which is rare for me. The positive effect of this was that I didn't get nearly as sick as I usually do. Nothing else major happened that evening. There was pie for dessert but I didn't even have any of that. I think we watched a movie that night. I slept on the couch and was therefore disturbed in the morning. I got up, ate, and showered. My uncle said he was going to take us to Plymouth Plantation. It sounded very educational...

My sister didn't want to go. At first I resented her, but she said she was going to bake while we were gone. My uncle, mom, dad, and I set out. First we went back to Plymouth Rock which was swamped with people. In the water very near the rock is the *Mayflower II*, a perfect replica of the original ship. We took a tour of it and I learned a lot. We got back on the Interstate and not much later we were at Plymouth Plantation.

It was nothing as I could have expected or hoped. In the main building we saw a short movie about it. We moved outside to the main attraction--the pilgrim village. I can try to explain what it's like but you'll never really know if you don't go!

The year is 1627. You're in a village of rustic 15th century homes. Everyone you see (other than other tourists) is dressed, behaving, and talking like a pilgrim in that year. Wait, it gets better. They don't play the parts of just any old generic person. Everyone is cast to be an actual person from that time. Passenger manifests, dated records, and family bloodlines are studied to determine exactly who was living in the settlement in 1627. Not only do they have an incredible knowledge of general information from that period, but they have studied every aspect of the life of the person they portray. They don't know the word "fun," only "pleasure." The only definition of "kids" they know is baby goats. It's quite spectacular. My uncle comes from Holland. He has visited the event at least five times since living in the area. There is a woman who works there, who portrays a woman who came from Holland in the 1620's. She actually speaks Flemish! Ever since meeting her, my uncle makes it a point to speak Dutch with her every time he goes...but only if the children aren't around. We spent a few hours in just the pilgrim village. When it was getting dark, we went down to the Indian village, another attraction at the plantation, as of course, the lands were inhabited by natives long before the pilgrims arrived. We were only able to spend about 20-30 minutes there before leaving. It was all I could think about on the way home. I'd already made up my mind that we were going back.

Dinner was leftovers. We watched another movie that night. This time I got to sleep on the air mattress in the living room. The next morning I eagerly got ready to go back. This time it was just my mom and uncle and me. Upon arriving, we walked through the indoor exhibition, which contrasted the lives of a native girl and a pilgrim girl through the 1600's--very informative. After we ate lunch, we went back out to the Indian village to get a better look with the assistance of daylight. There was much to be learned there as well. That village isn't set up like the Pilgrim village. The people, who are all actual descendants of the tribe, speak from a modern perspective. There was much less to do there. After about 30-40 minuets we went back to the Pilgrim village. We spent another couple hours there and of course, before leaving, said goodbye to Hester, the Dutch woman. We stopped by the gift shop and I got a very good deal on a shirt. The cashier overheard my enthusiastic comments and gave me

some information on the place. Next year I intend to try getting a job there.

We went home and just as we walked in, my aunt was running out. She was going to get lobster for dinner. As you may know from an earlier story, I am now quite proficient at eating lobster. It was very enjoyable. At 8 o'clock *Blues Brothers* came on TV and we all watched it and had cherry pie. When it was time for bed, I noticed that the air mattress had lost a significant amount of air. My sleep was less than comfortable but I got over it.

The next morning we got up very early. My sister wanted to watch the sun rise but it wasn't a priority. We packed the car and made some sandwiches. After the goodbyes were said, we left, trying not to wake the neighbors. Six hours later at Lehigh we dropped my sister back off at college. Then we continued home. Man, did our house ever seem boring after that weekend.

I didn't want it to end, but unfortunately it had to. At least I'll always have my memories and now that they've been immortalized in this story, you will too. It really was the best Thanksgiving ever!

I Beat Pete

by Steven Conway

If you have cable, you may have heard of a station called Comcast SportsNet. On that station, there is an anchor named Pete Christy. Every week, he does an "I Beat Pete" segment. "I Beat Pete" is a chance for viewers to send in challenges of their best sport or game. If Pete accepts your challenge, he will call you up and say that he wants to challenge you. If you win, you receive an official "I Beat Pete" t-shirt and you get to say the words "I Beat Pete".

A couple of months ago, I decided to send in a letter to Pete challenging him to a half-court shooting contest. We would each shoot ten shots and whoever made the most would win. Three weeks ago, Pete called me up and accepted the challenge. It was scheduled to be held at Upper Moreland High School, but due to complications I did not expect, the contest was moved to my elementary school in Abington Township. We both agreed that Sunday, November first would be a good date. He arrived a little bit late, but I didn't mind waiting because it gave me extra time to practice. In practice he made a total of three shots. However, I made three shots in a row. Needless to say, Pete and the cameraman were both impressed.

After we were finished practicing, we filmed the opening. Unfortunately, the camera had a little light on top, so when I attempted my first shot, camera flashes were still in front of my eyes, so my first shot hit the ceiling. After that shot, I calmed down and started to hit the backboard. Pete was very consistent - on air balls. Five of his ten shots were air balls. The fourth shot I attempted went in to take an early one- to-nothing lead. Nobody made any shots in rounds five through nine. When Pete attempted his tenth and final shot, he knew he had to make it to keep the game going. I was praying so hard that he wouldn't make it. The ball left his hand and it didn't go through, which meant I had won the challenge. Just for fun, I decided to shoot my tenth shot that didn't go in. After that, we filmed the closing and I was handed my t-shirt. His record dropped to nine and twenty-one.

This issue will probably come out after I am on television, but I will tell you that I will be on

between 10:00 and 11:00 P.M. on Thursday, November 12 and between 6:30 and 7:30 P.M. on Friday, November 13.

PlayStation

by John Silvestri

In my opinion, PlayStation is the best system for gaming ever made. It uses a quad (4x) speed CD-ROM drive with 2 slots for controllers, with a total capacity of 4 or 5 controllers with a special attachment. It has a 386 processor and 2 slots for interchangeable memory cards. Each memory card holds up to 15 pages (or saves) for games. Although this doesn't sound impressive for a computer gaming system, you have to remember that it was made 3 or 4 years ago and that this was state of the art. Also, Sony is coming out with a PlayStation 2 which will be better than Nintendo 64. Also, all the games are on a CD-ROM so they are easier to carry, store, run, etc. They are also easily cleaned, just run the CD under water and dry. The graphics on games like Final Fantasy 7, Twisted Metal 2, Tomba, and other games are astounding. With a CD you can store more information than a cartridge. Also, you can have 2 or 3 or up to 5 CD's as in Riven, the sequel to Myst that came out on PlayStation. There are more overall games for PlayStation than Nintendo 64 and the quality of games is higher. I know someone who has a Nintendo 64 but doesn't use it anymore due to the low replay value. PlayStation games are fun to play over and over. Also, games for PlayStation are relatively cheaper than the games for Nintendo 64, and they go as low as $15. Heck, even I can afford that and I only have a paper route. When the PlayStation 2 comes out, the old games should work in the new system, meaning faster loading and gameplay, which will be good for older PlayStation games. I highly recommend the PlayStation gaming system for anyone who can afford $129 which for a gaming system is a bargain.

Nintendo 64

A few weeks ago, I may have agreed with John on his PlayStation report. At the time, the console's future looked very promising, and there were quite a few good games for it. I had even considered buying one in addition to my Nintendo 64. But that all has changed.

Nintendo 64 has higher specifications than PlayStation. The CD format has been eliminated, not making the player have to wait for a few seconds every time a scene has to load, displaying an annoying "Loading, please wait" sign on the screen. On fast-paced action games, this can get annoying. The only problem with Nintendo 64 is that it does not have a dedicated sound processor, but that is easily compensated for by adding what Nintendo terms a "Reality Co-processor", which really amounts to extra gaming power. But the specs mean nothing if the games don't live up to them.

I had always been saying that Nintendo would eventually end up on top, and on November 23, it was shown. When *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* was released, the system became a must-have for any serious gamer. This game approached proportions that games such as *Final Fantasy 7* and *Super Mario 64* had before, but it was many times better than them. First of all, the game had managed to eliminate the fog that is present in most other games because of limited memory. That was quite an achievement in itself. The innovations and attention to detail in the game are practically endless. For example, you can look at the sun in the sky, and circles appear on the screen as if the sun was shining into a camera. The Z-targeting system is also a masterpiece. When the player presses Z, the camera always faces that enemy, and Link (the hero) sidesteps around it. Also, the point that makes this game different than all the other Zelda/Final Fantasy games is suggested in its title: Time Travel.

With games like *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* (which the author of the Play Station report said that he wanted to buy) and *Turok 2* coming out in a matter of weeks, the Nintendo 64 will easily be put on top. These games are on the next generation of technology, and surpass PlayStation and PC games in almost every way. With the 4 MB expansion pak now being released, Nintendo 64 games can now

achieve a resolution equal to some PC monitors.

As you can see, the Nintendo 64 is a better gaming system than the PlayStation, and I recommend that, if you have to make a decision, buy the best gaming system on the market, Nintendo 64.

Eating Your Way to Prosperity

by Matthew Care

Have you noticed? People are getting fatter and fatter. Keep in mind, I'm making a generalization. It is very apparent in children today. People eat and eat. They shove greasy double cheese burgers down their pipes and then wonder why they get fat. The United States is, I believe, the only county that has made an industry out of weight loss. But I think I know why.

It all comes down to the Great Depression of the 1920-30's. Some time during that era people had instilled in them the overpowering sense of a good deal. From then on, the four sweetest words in the English language became "all you can eat". And it only got worse as generations passed. It's so bad that people are actually afraid to leave food on their plate after a meal. Well, let me say, I have a hundred times more respect for a person who can walk away from a half of a steak then one who can force it down. I know I wouldn't have that kind of will power. I can't even go to a buffet anymore!

The real problem is the availability of food. In some countries, people are lucky if they get the same number of calories in a year that Americans get in a month. Like so many other Americans before me, I am on a quest to lose weight. Even in the worst case, I'd never resort to surgery. The idea of fat being sucked out of a person sickens me. I don't trust drugs either. You know those "weight loss" pills? All they are are some depressants that make you not want to eat. I'm trying to get in shape the old-fashioned way. Exercise! The best motivation is self-motivation.

It's a daunting task to try and analyze all the problems people have with eating. I should be fair though. It's only partly psychological. A person's metabolism has a lot to do with it too.

Well, try and digest all this. But, if you can't, leave some on your plate and try again later.

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 14

The door opened in a flash. The trolls jumped out, ready to battle the forces in the hall. Inside, it was equally chaotic: knights readied their armor, the king shouted out orders, and Christopher, Dave, Chapin, and Katie were prepared to use magic if necessary.

The knights surged toward the door, toward the trolls. The trolls were great in number, at least a hundred, and the battle began. The king's soldiers ran outside to protect the population in the hall. One swung his sword left and right, cutting down three of the trolls. Archers mounted the tables and attempted to aim at the trolls, who were now at the door.

Christopher rushed ahead of the screaming knights but found that the trolls were now around the perimeter of the hall. Other trolls rushed down from the castle high up on the top of the structure. The ground became soaked with the blood of the fallen soldiers. But it was clear that the king's soldiers were winning the battle.

The trolls were far outnumbered and began to fall. Christopher finally got outside and looked for Mike, but he was nowhere to be seen or heard. Near the bottom of the castle structure, the remainder of the trolls were in hasty retreat, running toward the town gates.

As the trolls fled, the king exited the hall to survey the scene. Many knights had fallen but twice as many trolls lay dead. The ground was stained red.

At that time, many things happened. The trolls were out of the gates, heading for their escape. Knights poured out of the hall to assess the damage. Chapin, Dave, and Katie also made it out of the gates but were dismayed with what they saw. Through the chaos, Mike was nowhere to be seen.

On the walkway to the left of the hall, the king ordered the knights to begin the cleanup. At once, many headed for the river to fetch water to wash away the remains of the battle. There were many weapons scattered about; and the king ordered his men to give them to Sean and his clan. In all, there were at least forty swords and a handful of bows without arrows. Knights who had now taken off their armor carried the bodies of the dead trolls to a mass grave outside the city. Inside, maids tended to the knights who were injured.

Meanwhile, during this commotion, the four searched for Mike, but there was still no sign of him. Chapin suggested that they split up. They agreed that it would be a faster way to cover the terrain. Dave and Katie headed for the ground level, while Christopher climbed higher in case Mike was in the throne room or any of the other upper rooms. Chapin opted to search among the people in the hall and in the houses.

Thirty minutes later, they met back in the hall, which was now emptying out. Knights headed to their homes. The king had retreated to the throne room ten minutes before, confident that his knights would finish the cleanup by themselves. Chapin was the first to speak.

"Have you found him?"

"No," Dave replied. Katie nodded. "He's nowhere to be seen."

"I haven't found him either," Christopher said.

"Then the worst may be true: he has been captured by the trolls," Dave said.

"My thoughts exactly," said Katie. "But what should we do now that we have discovered that he has been captured?"

"Obviously, we can't leave him there," Chapin stated. "We'll have to organize a search party."

Below, traders entered the gates, which were now opened, and stopped for a second in surprise after being told by the waiting guards what had happened. They then continued around the great structure and to the marketplace, which had been ransacked.

"We can pose as a band of traders," Dave suggested.

"What?" Katie asked in astonishment.

"That would be a good idea," Christopher replied. "The trolls need supplies, just like humans do. Leading an army right in to the middle of Yavin's territory is just likely to get us all killed. But if we posed as a band of traders, we could infiltrate the camp, and maybe free Mike."

"What would we trade?"

"I don't know," Christopher apologized. "Does anybody have any ideas?"

"I do." Sean stepped out from behind Dave, who was now standing perilously close to the edge of the structure. The flimsy wooden railing that was behind him would not protect him if he lost his balance. Looking over the side of the railing, he could see several bodies, but from over thirty feet up, he couldn't see whether they were trolls or people. He stepped away from the edge. Sean continued talking.

"Let's trade the red stone." An involuntary gasp went up from Katie. Everybody thought about this unusual suggestion for a minute and then decided that this would be a good idea.

"That makes sense," Christopher said. "We don't even have to trade the stone. We can try to get Mike back first."

"Go on," Sean prompted.

"Well, if we have about five or six people, three can pose as the traders while the others stay as backup in case something goes wrong. When we go into the camp to initiate the trade, we make it clear that the trade takes place the next day. Then during the night, the others can try to rescue Mike from the camp. If they get caught, then we can try to trade for them, too. If not, we go away with Mike AND the stone."

"Sounds complicated," Dave said.

"It's complicated," Chapin said, "but I think it might have a chance of working."

"The only problem is that we need to get two more people," Dave worried.

"I guess I've been volunteered," Sean muttered partially under his breath. Chapin heard him and laughed. Dave and Christopher looked at her strangely and then got the point.

"Let's go to the king right now," Christopher suggested. He started up the stairs of the great structure. The ground fell away as he ascended to dizzying heights.

The first level, below the hall, contained the marketplace, some of which was inside and some outside. Below the structure, as Sean told him from past experiences in this town, was supposed to be a great treasure vault, maybe even many floors deep. He knew that there was an entrance in the King's chambers that provided secret entrances to any of the lower rooms. The third floor of the structure housed the knights and royal servants. The fourth was built for the same purpose, and the fifth, smaller than all the other levels except the throne room, included housing for dignitaries from other countries or anybody who needed rest. This room had gone unneeded for many months now.

When they were at the top level, the guards recognized who they were immediately and granted them entry. The king was in the corner of the room, talking to one of the knights, who was briefing him on the state of the recovery. It was noon by the time they were able to talk to the king.

After a few minutes of discussion, the king allowed them to take one of his best knights with them to the troll camp. They would leave the next morning. Before the party left the throne room, a spy was already on its way to search out the location of the troll camp.

Since it was only midafternoon, they decided to see what they could do to help restore order after the terrible battle that had ensued earlier. The knights had already buried the bodies of the deceased trolls; all that remained was to repair the damage that they had caused to the town. Some knights were bringing great buckets of water up to the second story in order to clean the blood which stained the ground. However, this turned out to be easy: they had finished in under a half hour.

Soon the builders came and began to make repairs to several houses on the ground that had been damaged. When it was clear that Dave, Christopher, Katie, Chapin, and Sean were not needed, they decided to see where they would stay the night since most of the town was destroyed. The king granted them rooms in the knights' quarters, and at once they proceeded to the third level.

The next day, the first of September, it rained for most of the day. It was a dreary, cold rain,

which made everything seem chilled and eerie. Fortunately, inside the structure, there wasn't a sign of the rain, and throughout most of the day they stayed inside, there being no activity outdoors. The spy had not returned, but that was not unusual; they had not expected him to return for several days.

Even on the day after, it rained also, and this day it was colder than the one before. The spy did not return until the fourth day. By that time, it was finally sunny again, but the air was turning chilly with the approach of Autumn. The party had gathered in the King's chamber to trade information and to set off.

"This is Matt. You will be taking him with you," the king was saying. "You asked for some help."

"Nice to meet you," Matt said, and bowed down formally. After introductions had been exchanged, the king resumed his briefing."

"The spy that we sent yesterday did not return good news," he continued. "The troll camp is located about ten miles to the northwest, closer to Yavin's territory. There are at least one hundred trolls there, maybe more; the spy was unable to ascertain the exact number. The camp is located in the middle of the plains, since there is no cover anywhere near there, save for a few trees, so sneaking up to infiltrate the camp will be impossible except at night."

"Do you have the red stone?" Christopher asked Katie, who had been carrying it for the day.

"Right here," she said, holding it up. It shone in an eerie intensity, its red light suggesting its evil nature.

"Because of this," Dave said, "We will have to modify our plans somewhat. We can no longer sneak up on the camp just by hiding because it is in the middle of a field.":

"We will have to rethink our plans on the way there," Matt interrupted Dave. "The spy also reported that the trolls were moving farther north, toward Yavin's fortress. But there is one peculiar point about their movements-"

"They're moving west," Katie said. "Yavin's castle is to the east."

"Why would they be moving to the west if they are trying to get back to the castle?" Chapin asked.

"Maybe they aren't trying to get back to the castle," the king said, all but forgotten during the speculation.

"Where, then, would they be going?"

There was no response. The silence was only interrupted by birds outside the castle singing in the morning light. The day was cool, but it seemed that it would be getting warmer. Matt turned to the group and said flatly, "I think we'd better be going."

"We will rethink our strategy on the way there," Chapin said. They paid their respects to the king, and then departed. As they descended the stairs, the bright morning sun shone just inches above the horizon behind them, as they sailed off into the west in what possibly could be their last mission.

Mike's head was hurting tremendously, so much that he thought that he would pass out again. It was hot again; Mike assumed that it was now daytime. It was hard to tell whether it was day or night except for the temperature, because he was blindfolded and bound to a tree. Even at night it was still warm; there was probably a fire built somewhere near where he was sitting. Someone had placed a small log underneath him now: he was sitting on the log with his hands bound behind the trunk of the tree. His legs were bound together, and somehow he was held down so that he could not stand up.

Since he had nothing else better to do, Mike thought yet again of what he could have done to prevent his current predicament. He could just vaguely remember what had happened after he had left the gates of the city. He knew that the trolls had captured him and left quickly after, setting fire to houses while they walked, but after they had left the gates, everything became fuzzy.

He remembered being told to drink something, and he had refused, but they had forced him to drink it anyway. After that, they had bound him, but he didn't know why he hadn't fought back. Maybe he had, but throughout the rest of the entire day, he remembered throwing up while he was lying

on top of a horse, fading in and out of consciousness. Then they had gotten here sometime during the night, he guessed, and tied him to the tree where he was now. He had stayed there throughout the whole day, being fed by the trolls, and falling asleep shortly after every meal, not waking up for hours later.

Mike was sore from how he was sitting. He tried to adjust his weight, but it was to no use, he could not even move. He had felt his legs getting numb long before, and now he knew the only way to remedy that was if he was untied, but there was no sign of that happening.

He wondered where Dave, Katie, Chapin, and Christopher were, and whether they were planning to rescue him. What he did not know was that the camp was being watched at this very moment by one of the king's spies, collecting information so that they could get him out.

The trolls now came over to give him a drink of water. He accepted it: he hadn't had anything to drink for the entire day. He soon felt himself becoming dreary, and he was soon asleep.

"Get down!" Dave whispered, and the rest of the group did so promptly, even though they were talking twice as loudly as Dave had. Dave pointed in the distance, straight into the setting sun.

Katie shielded her eyes from the large red ball which was almost touching the horizon. There were silhouettes in front of it now, just a few trees many miles distant, but there was smoke rising from the middle of them. Even with the barrenness around them, it was hard to pick out the camp from the sparse pines that were around the area. The grass was waist deep at this time of year, and Christopher had joked during the slow journey that Mike couldn't have picked a worse time to be captured.

Crouching in the grass, Matt spoke. "The camp has been moved. It was more to the east last time, at least ten miles. They <u>are</u> going to the west."

"Yavin's peoples are becoming even more strange as we speak," Katie commented.

"Let's not worry about this for now," Christopher said. "After we rescue Mike successfully, we will try to ascertain the reasons for this."

"Let's carry on," Dave said.

It must be night again, Mike thought. If he was correct, it had been at least five days since he had been captured. This was the second time that he had been moved. He was now tied to a tree in a similar fashion that he was before. Since it was very cold now, he assumed that it was nighttime.

Suddenly, there was a loud shout from the far side of the camp. Several trolls growled. Mike wished that he had been able to see what was going on. Just as suddenly, the shouting ceased, but he could still clearly hear voices from there.

"Who are you?" one of the voices, this one coming from a troll, demanded.

"I am a trader who has traveled far and wide. We simply wish to offer you our goods. Perhaps we can strike some agreement," the other one said. This one was from a person that he didn't recognize either.

"We don't want no goods," the troll responded.

"Are you sure?" the human voice continued. "I have-" he was cut off by the troll, who responded gruffly,

"I already told you, we don't want none of your junk. Now be on your way before any trouble happens."

"I don't want any trouble," the other insisted. "But maybe you'd be interested in..." There was a gasp from the trolls, most of them closer to Mike than the trader. "This."

"Well," the troll said, appearing to rethink his position. "What you want for somethin' like this?"

"I could have gotten a good steed for this in any other town, maybe even a few bars of gold to add on. But instead, I'll settle for 15 bars of silver."

"What you tryin' to do, cheat us? This ain't worth half that much."

"Who's that over there?"

"Oh, that's just one 'a our captives from a previous battle. Don't worry about 'im."

"Let's make a deal then. If you're not worried about him, I'll trade this stone for the boy."

"Well, da boss might not be happy. We was supposed to keep 'im and bring 'im back to da boss."

"Well, if that isn't good enough for you, I'll just leave and be on my way..."

"Wait," the troll shouted. Mike assumed that the other person was getting ready to leave. "You got yourself a deal."

"I'm glad to hear it. I need some time to talk to my cohorts. I'll be back in the morning to conduct the trade."

"Wait. What you tryin' to pull on us? You trying to cheat me? We trolls don't let nobody cheat us! We'll smash your skull in if we catch you cheating!"

"I understand. I just wanted to-"

Another voice was now heard, another troll: "Just come with us, and you won't be hurt."

"I'm just a plain old honest trader. I'm not trying to cheat you! I'll just leave and we can call the whole deal off."

"No, you're comin' with us," the new troll said. Several other trolls made angry grunts.

Suddenly, the troll shouted. "He's getting away. That fiend! CAPTURE HIM!" There was the sound of footsteps away from the camp, and then silence. Mike settled back down for another long night.

A few minutes later, the trolls returned. There was some muffled kicking and screaming. Mike assumed that it was the trader who the trolls had just captured. He would be having some company soon.

He could hear the sounds getting closer and closer, and then suddenly, there was a loud thump to his left. He assumed that it was the captive being bound to a tree. Soon, the trolls returned to their places. He heard crackling and it was beginning to get warmer now.

"Who are you?" Mike whispered to his left, where he assumed that the captured trader was.

"Quiet," he replied. "The trolls are listening. Wait until later tonight-"

"YOU!" One of the trolls screamed across the camp. "BE QUIET!"

Mike immediately became silent. Both of them knew that they would talk after the trolls were asleep. Then he turned his thoughts to Dave, Katie, Christopher, and Chapin, and wondered where they were...

The birds were chirping. It would not be long before they were gone, so Christopher savored their sounds in the morning light. The few deciduous trees that were able to survive in the barren land were crimson with light from the sun shining on their greenish-yellow leaves. Since Matt hadn't returned, he feared the worst, and had neglected to wake Dave for his shift at watch. Instead, he just sat and thought.

Finally, about a half hour after sunrise, he went over to the party and awakened them. Dave rolled over gently, and then his eyes snapped open and he shot up.

"What time? Did I?" he blurted out, looking at Christopher.

"Don't worry about it," he replied. "Matt hasn't returned."

"That is grave news," Chapin commented, her face sullen. Katie was not yet awake enough to comprehend what this meant.

"We have to go and make a rescue attempt," Dave said.

"We should go back to the castle and get a small group to help us," suggested Chapin.

"That would take too much time," Katie said, now fully awake. "That is something we don't have. It would take three or four days to get back to the castle, another two to get troops assembled, assuming the king allows us some of his assistance, and four days to journey back. The camp may have moved by that time, and then we'll never find them."

"Then we have decided. Let's go there now. Get the stones ready. We may need to use them to free Mike," Christopher said.

Once everything was prepared (just a few minutes later), they set out for the camp. Since it was so early, the trolls were just getting ready to sleep (trolls sleep in the morning and need only about 4 hours of sleep, as was commonplace knowledge of the world). They decided to wait for about a half hour to ensure that the camp would be asleep.

After the time had passed, and the sun was high enough in the sky to see the plains ahead clearly, they continued. It wasn't far, but they hid and rested behind the sparse trees that lined the landscape.

Soon, they were there. There was a loud noise. At first, Christopher, Chapin, Katie, and Dave thought that they had been discovered by the trolls, but there was no activity, so they got up from their hiding place in some brush and continued onward.

Presently, they were outside the clearing. Dave peeked out from behind the trunk of the tree he was hiding behind. He could see the trolls fast asleep. Mike was on the left, tied to another tree, while Matt was to his left, bound and gagged. Then he noticed that there were two guards standing watch near the prisoners.

"We can't go in like this," Dave whispered. "There's guards right in front of them!"

"What should we do?" Katie asked impatiently. "The guards might see us if we stay here."

"Use the Hadar Stone," Christopher suggested.

"That was exactly what I was thinking," Katie said. "Watch." She pulled the stone out of her pocket and it began to glow. She quickly put it back before the guards saw the bright light.

Then, with care, she reached into her pocket and held the stone until she seemed to become translucent. Suddenly, in a flash, she disappeared.

"I'm going to try to rescue them," Katie's voice said. "Get ready to run in case we're spotted."

Without a word, she ran off. Faint footsteps fell in the chill morning air. Watching from his vantage point, Christopher could clearly see Katie untying Matt, who was closer. He was awake, and looked like he was trying to scream. Soon, however, he calmed down and returned to normal. When he was freed, he stood there, with the ropes over his hands and feet, with no sign of being able to free himself at any moment.

The guards, one of which was falling asleep and the other looking the other way, took no notice of this. Katie then went over to Mike when the guards turned around and looked at the footprints on the ground.

"Wake up," he said. The other troll stirred. "Somethin's goin' on here. Look at dem footprints!"

"Get the boss!" the other responded. They ran off to wake the trolls. Events started to happen quickly now. Katie, who was walking in the middle of Mike and Matt, could not risk being seen, so she ran back to Matt and hid behind the tree.

"Go! Now!" she whispered. Matt slowly sat up as if not to draw any attention, and stealthily moved out from in front of the tree. Katie, still invisible, followed him out of the grove of trees and shrubbery.

Looking back at Mike, she saw that he was still sleeping as if nothing had happened. They had to get Mike out of the camp as soon as possible. But it was too late. The trolls were already coming back. They settled behind the bushes to watch the drama unfold.

"Where did he go?" the boss demanded, approaching the spot where the cords ly on the ground where they had been left.

"I dunno, boss," one of the two said. "He was here before I left 'im to get you, and-"

"What? WHAT! You left him so that you could go get me if something suspicious was happening? There are TWO OF YOU! Get it through your head! One a' you should'a stayed here."

"But-"

"No buts. Strange things have been happenin' aroun' here lately. We got to get outta of this place. Maybe it's that king's knights."

There was no response from the other trolls. The first continued talking. "Pack up the camp.

We're leaving in fifteen minutes to report to Ka'tah.

"Yes, sir!" was the response, and they immediately dispersed to ready the group for departure. The trolls began to stir at having been awaken.

Back behind the bushes, the five continued to watch. They had caught Matt up on the latest events while they had been watching the activities of the trolls. Now Dave spoke. "What should we do now?" he asked Christopher. "The trolls are moving out. We need to hurry."

"Hurry, indeed," Christopher replied, deep in thought. "But if we act now, the trolls will surely spot us and capture us as well." They were startled by a shout from the other side of the camp, but it turned out only to be a troll signaling that there was five minutes until they left.

"We'll just have to follow them," Matt said. "What other choice do we have?"

"If only we had backup from the castle," Christopher said.

"We're four days away from the castle," Matt said in a down-to-earth attitude. "If we go back, it'll be nine or ten days before we even get back here, and that's ten days behind the trolls as they move."

"Which direction do you think they will go?" Katie queried.

"It would be logical for them to go northeast, toward Yavin's fortress," Matt said. "But these trolls have been far from logical, moving northwest. If the trolls are going back somewhat to the east, it shouldn't be hard for two of us to take a detour to the castle to ready an army. But if they continue heading west, we have no choice."

The trolls were almost prepared now. Chapin talked with haste. "What if two of us go back to get reinforcements? One of us can't go, because he risks being captured very easily. An army on horses would be able to travel at least twice as fast as the trolls."

"Not possible," Matt reminded. "Most of our horses were slain by the trolls in their raid on the town. There might be ten or twenty left in the entire town, which would be no match for these trolls. Besides, by the time they get to the trolls, wherever they are going, it might already be too late."

"Let's just follow them and see what happens," Dave suggested, and strangely, that was the end of the discussion. On the far side of the camp, there was a shout, and the trolls began moving.

"Well, here goes," Chapin said in words that would prove to be prophetic later. The trolls began walking westward, carrying Mike toward what possibly could be an early grave.