Mirror, Mirror,
On My Car
Mirror, Mirror, On My Car

Robert S. Swiatek

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Introduction

At the beginning of all my previous books and in just about any book you read, there is a common warning to people not to plagiarize or pilfer material without the permission of the publisher or author. I’m sure you’re quite familiar with the words that start out with, “No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, etc.” Note that the last abbreviation just before the closing quote mark is not part of it, but it is an acronym that describes just exactly what those words are. If you’ve read a book or two of mine, you know my interpretation of ETC. If not, I’ll explain it in chapter 3.

It’s obvious what those words of warning intend, but you won’t see them at the beginning of this book because it’s nothing but a waste of space and words. I really don’t want people to take a page or two of this book and publish it or call it their own, but how can I stop them from doing it? Much of what you read here is common sense or knowledge familiar to us, so I have no copyright on that, and anyone is free to pass that information on. If you see something that makes an impact and want to use it, feel free to do so and if you want to mention my name and this book, I won’t object to that. If you glossed over what I put in place of those words at the beginning of most books, you may want to return to see the few words I wrote, which are closer to the truth.

Sometime during 2008 – in the midst of my publishing adventures – I thought about what books I would write next. I thought about republishing my cookbook, as well as publishing the first book I wrote, a computer math
effort. Another possibility was a book of essays that remained unpublished, which needs updating. I am seriously considering a book on cancer, and in early 2009, I began another book off to the side in the *for seeing eye dogs only* series. The project I couldn’t wait to begin was a book on truth – what is it and how do we find it? Because of the effort of bringing six books into print last year, I acknowledged the fact that I couldn’t think of the book on truth until the beginning of 2009, which I began in earnest on January 1.

My decision for doing this book has to do with writing, but it also applies to each of us in many ways, whether we look for the truth, or want to make it a part of our behavior. Someone said that if you told the truth, you’d have less to remember. I can’t argue with that but many people take care of that problem with the words, “I can’t recall.” When they utter that phrase, they may be sincere, but others are just not willing to relate what happened. One of the words you can find on my web site is *excellence*, which can’t be achieved with laziness and the use of falsehood. Of course, we all have good intentions, but sometimes fail for various reasons.

In April 2009, I stopped in to the local library to return some books and checked out a single book and one DVD, *Be Kind Rewind*, which is a clever title. I’m probably reading more into it than what’s there, but I really loved the movie and highly recommend it for a few reasons, other than the title. It starts with Thomas “Fats” Waller, the legendary musician, and it mentions that he spent time in Passaic, New Jersey, a city in which I rented a studio apartment in late
1968. I wasn’t there very long, as I moved to the town of Clifton nearby, before I eventually moved back to Buffalo. The movie covers a few subjects besides music. It deals with movies, neighborhoods and trying to save them, as well as offering some outrageous humor.

One point that surfaces in the movie is truth. Miss Falewicz, played by Mia Farrow, points out that you can make a movie even though some of the bits aren’t true. They become reality if one believes in them. That’s obviously not true – I’ll spend more time on that thought later – but this approach can accomplish something in defining a person, even if some of the specifics are a bit off. What takes place in *Be Kind Rewind* shows that Hollywood takes liberties but inspires us to knowledge in a few ways. Viewing the life of Weller, even if only seeing a small part of it, can move viewers to read a book about him, thereby uncovering some truth.

Sometime shortly after I began college in September 1960, I happened to enter a cinema. That may have been what triggered my interest in movies. I will reference a few throughout this book, since they relate to the subject matter, offering numerous lessons for us, as do books and television. Along with the information comes deception in all these venues, so it’s up to us to separate the truth from the lies. People understand that some people can’t handle the truth – many of us, in fact – but there are individuals who don’t let that get in the way of their lives. Others find it almost impossible to lie. You won’t find many people who don’t ever not lie, and others who always speak honestly, but we also need to consider scenarios where something may be true
one day and not so the next. As I said, it’s complicated.

Now that Barack Obama is president, there may be more truth in the nation’s capital. Well, maybe not, since we still have the comatose Congress and their compatriots, the lobbying lecherous leeches hanging around. I would prefer many of these people to simply be hanged. Sadly, politicians don’t have a monopoly on deception, greed and power, which are some of the reasons for statements that just aren’t true and promises that will never be carried out. We also have lawyers – some people have referred to them with the similarly sounding appellation of liars – marketers, agents, businessmen, CEOs, preachers, accountants and salesmen. In addition, I’m sure you know a few people who take liberties with the truth. B.S. is not unknown to them and these are people who never graduated from college or did so with a B.A.

My journey to explore the truth will cover many of these people as well as relationships, which none of us can avoid, unless we live in a cave. Let’s just pray that it has cable or a satellite dish. Television is loaded with deception, especially commercials, whether they are of the thirty-second variety or nauseating infomercials. You may have discovered that much of this blather is filled with lies. Even the regular programming has descended into depths never reached by television with reality TV, which is another annoying oxymoron.

I’ll delve into comments from critics, whether professionals or family, friends or otherwise. Before my first book was published, I was well aware of critics who panned a movie or book without seeing or reading it, respectively.
They’re still around today, and as I have discovered, it gets worse than that. I’ll also bring up the fact that many people just don’t want to hear the truth. If you are a writer or if you merely open your mouth to say something, there’s a good chance you could offend someone, even if you tossed out a compliment. Sadly, people are offended quite easily, even by words that weren’t meant to do so. We all have heard of great people who are attacked for the good that they do. I’ll also mention the need for keeping one’s mouth closed on occasion, which interferes with individual growth but is necessary. Another concern is that you can lie without uttering a word as well as the fact that what someone says may not be precise.

I’ll also talk about the differences between science and technology, a difference that at one time seemed non-existent. A related field that on many occasions uses facts in the wrong way has to do with statistics, studies and surveys. Illusion plays a great role in one’s beliefs, but perhaps we are simply overcome by what we want to believe rather than by what has actually occurred. The health care profession forces us to look closely at drugs and vitamins and one wonders whether any of those pills are necessary or effective. I couldn’t leave out a consideration of conspiracies and need to wonder if those who deny their very existence aren’t part of the conspiracy itself.

You may have seen the PBS program, History Detectives, which in the summer of 2009 returned to the air. I made it a point to record the show when it was on and I will talk about the process used by this great team of researchers to uncover the truth and simultaneously shed some light on
the history of an artifact. The research endeavor is something of great importance, so I will look at the role of historians, who sometimes fail to uncover what really happened. Going right along with that is the thought that maybe truth isn’t obtainable. However, with fingerprints, DNA evidence, as well as the advanced technology available today – questionable at times, though it is – it might appear that the truth really can’t be hidden, even if it takes some time to uncover it.

I mentioned excellence earlier. As a writer, I can’t produce a book that is completely free of errors – those miscues don’t necessary equate to lies. However, one of my goals is to minimize the mistakes, which means diligence, editors and proofreaders, who themselves are also capable of missing something which is not fact. It goes with the territory and can’t be avoided. They really aren’t to blame – it is my problem and that’s why I myself edit and proofread each of my books, more than once. The extra effort means that the truth is not likely to be distorted, which goes along with the idea of doing the best you can.

This quest has been the inspiration for the book. We need not be writers to strive for what’s right – something that people actually debate. Each of us looks for and expects honesty from others. When it is not achieved, we are very disappointed, but realize that our friends and family are human. Mistakes are part of life. As we shall discover, the idea is quite complicated. Just as it was my intention to have a book cover that is black and white, the gray is missing. Truth may be black or white, but gray more aptly describes what people think is the truth. It also is the color of how we
apply it to our everyday lives.

The first title I thought about using was *Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear*. People love titles that I choose for my books, even if they don’t buy any of them. Potential customers chuckle at the front page of the book, with its title and cover. Some naively ask me if these are children’s books, but they are probably confused by the illustrations, which tie in to the subject matter and bring out the fact that each of my productions has my sense of humor. This characteristic may sell books, but it has great ramifications as far as the truth is concerned. Just as potential customers misjudge the nature of my books, people misread others and their books as well. In this case there is a misreading of the book even before opening it.

I didn’t settle on that title, but rather a variation on it, which might result if one fails to heed the implications of the original title. The mirror image idea reflects the fact that truth is hard to achieve. Notice that the mirror on the passenger side of the car has the words that were my first choice for the title – indicating an inaccurate outlook – whereas the left or driver’s mirror seems to be quite truthful. I wonder if this has anything to do with the fact that we’re talking about the distortions and lies brought about by people in government on the right, whereas their counterparts – on the left – seem to have a better picture of the situation. I’m not the one who engineered these mirrors, so don’t blame me. I wonder if the misrepresentation is still present to the person sitting in the passenger seat up front. If so, there’s no reason for this problem, and another title would have been necessary. My second choice was *Objects In Mirror Are*
About To Smash Into Your Car: A Treatise On Truth, but I figured it might be too long, so the final title is what you see on the cover.

In the spring of 2007, I purchased a 2007 Toyota Prius, which turned out to be a complete assault on truth. I should have known better since I was dealing with a car dealership as well as a criminal corporation, which had “toy” in the name. At the time the company was actually number one in the pack. Unfortunately, they weren’t leading in the way they should have been and were like all the rest. After two years, I had had enough of the lies and traded in the car for a Honda Civic hybrid. One of the lies was the camera in the back of the Prius that displayed the scene behind the vehicle whenever I shifted the car into reverse. Along with the distorted view came constant beeping – another annoyance that I can do without – and this picture didn’t have the warning about the objects in the mirror. However, relying on it rather than glancing behind would guarantee a call to my insurance company. There were other technological deficiencies in the Prius, such as the gas gauge, inaccurate calculation of the mileage, displays that disappeared when you wanted them to remain, and another that wouldn’t leave, even though I was hoping that it would.

I’ll be referring to a few movies and books that fit in with our discussion of the subject matter. One book that is appropriate is Daphne du Maurier’s Rule Britannia. The 2008 flick, Doubt, starring Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman, is worth mentioning and one that you will not easily forget. Each has much relevance when it comes to revealing the truth, though in slightly different ways. The
movie and book are not unlike the journey we are about to embark on, which will not deal with the technicalities of mirrors, but rather with the complexity of uncovering the truth. It will be a long and involved endeavor and a complex one. Finding the right mirror to see the true picture will be of utmost importance to us.
1. You can’t handle the truth

The above words were uttered by Jack Nicholson in the 1992 movie, *A Few Good Men*. Sadly, most people can’t stomach reality very well, when it comes to statements applying to them and to other matters. Some people aren’t bothered at all, others will accept the truth with few qualms, while still others may not be that happy, but will still carry on. The last group finds it the most difficult to cope with under these circumstances.

Obviously, political correctness (PC) – a label that I wish was never coined – may enter into the picture. Politics is a nasty affair, but something that can’t be avoided. Handling the truth would be a great deal easier for all of us if people would exercise restraint and refrain from uttering a word. This is in spite of the fact that an individual might feel he has to illustrate just how smart he is. When someone tries to impress me, they usually don’t. One of the rules of email etiquette I posit is to not answer every email that you receive. I’m sure you have been the recipient of correspondences that upset you and you may have felt that you had to reply, but not in kind, if you know what I mean. The prescription I had in this instance was to stay silent, and if you really felt that an answer was warranted, wait a day. By that time you probably would come to your senses and figure that action was neither necessary nor productive. I included a bumper sticker in my last book of 2008, *here’s your free gift – send $10 for shipping*:

My silence could mean you are not worth the argument
No matter who you are, there will be times when each of us will be bothered by the comments of others. Everyone would be better off if people concerned themselves less with always speaking one’s mind and just had more consideration for others. We’re all in this together and none of us is perfect, so we may be too tall or vertically challenged – PC for the obesity thing or a subset of it – too talkative, too controlling or deficient in some way. We are all aware of our shortcomings, so we need not be reminded of them. This admonition is not contrary to the idea of always being truthful if we remember that we have the ability to keep our mouths closed on numerous occasions. This goes right along with the rule of being less negative and more just the opposite, despite what we may be facing in our lives.

When you visit a foreign land, you may not talk much – especially if the natives don’t speak a dialect that suits your understanding – but that doesn’t mean that you can’t insult someone. Your verbal responses as well as other gestures could have a different significance than the same behavior in your own land, resulting in offending the home folks. Traveling to Europe, Asia or South America is a great thing insofar as travelers experience other cultures and witness how others live. Thus, it is not an option to stay in one’s own state and refuse to travel, if being a globe trekker results in passing out insults, even unintentionally. The real solution is to learn more before you go, so as to avoid embarrassing moments abroad.

This phenomenon of telling the truth, no matter what the consequences, can be attributed to a few causes. Some
people say what they think, and they have always been that way. They have been brought up with the idea of righteousness and they figure that what they observe and take note of must be relayed to others, especially those they can help. The thought of improvement is a good one but in many cases, it would be appreciated if the advice came in private – one on one – as opposed to where all could hear. Feelings need to be considered. Ironically, the people who have no concerns about what they say to others – regardless of the veracity – aren’t very pleased when a similar situation occurs in which they are on the receiving end. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Another explanation has to do with the situation in the country, within our own family or within our own life. I will return to this idea in the chapter on critics, but you can see that something that transpires in the office may bring the delivery of abuse on a spouse or children later in the day. They certainly don’t deserve this. Of course, there are instances in which a long-time friend does something with results that we weren’t expecting. On one occasion I met a gentleman whom I had a great deal of respect for. One day the Sunday news pointed out that he had been making off with funds that didn’t belong to him. I was disappointed to say the least. Each of us has experienced this same situation, maybe even from a family member. Obviously, this upsets people unless scruples never were a part of your makeup.

Friendships can be broken down into a few classes. The first begins and is long lasting – something we hope would be true of marriages. The second type is one that develops and grows, but then ends only because someone
moved away from the other. That could be the end of it or the friendship could resume at a later date. The final type is one that ends – this could certainly apply to either of the first two relationships described – either with or without fireworks, even when it’s not the Fourth of July. In each of these cases, the title of this chapter could apply, that is words could be uttered that should have been held back. On too many occasions, a retort is not worth the effort.

No matter what kind of relationship you are talking about, one needs to understand that no one is perfect. Thus, our friend may do things of which we don’t approve, even though it may have been acceptable earlier in the friendship. Life is too short for bickering and fighting, so we need to accept others for what they are, realizing that we ourselves have faults as well. Too often, brothers and sisters refuse for years on end to see each other or talk. No family is spared this behavior, but it shouldn’t occur. Whatever caused the rift really wasn’t that significant or important. Forgiveness is necessary in all our lives.

The twenty-first century doesn’t help matters with all the advances that have been showered on us. I discussed in great detail the failure of email in *Press 1 For Pig Latin*, my book on the deficiencies of technology. You might disagree with me and feel that communication is better than ever. Consider the individual who has a small dinner party and sends out four invitations using email. Three of the parties respond, with two saying they will attend with their spouses and the third says she will be there, alone. The last invitee doesn’t get back to the host, so the invitation is sent a second time. Still there is no response and the sender figures that his
friend is busy and can’t make it. The dinner takes place and a short time after that contact is made between the missing party and the person who cooked the dinner. There might be some hard feelings, or maybe the two come to an understanding of just what happened, since the email was never received.

Perhaps the host should have called the intended guest, but suppose that had been done, a message left at the household, but the intended person never received it. Answering machines have been known to fail and a family member may have forgotten to pass the invitation along to her parents. She simply forgot. If the dinner was at the end of the year, a third option was to send a Christmas greeting with the invitation inside the envelope. Until the end of 2007, I had a great deal of confidence in the United States Post Office. After experiencing the loss of books that I had sent across the country – I know because I tried to track them – I’m not that enamored with the service. In fact, it has only gotten worse. You know these feelings if you read some of my books, especially the ones on missing intelligence. Thus, each of the three options – email, phone and regular mail, could fail.

My cousin takes no chances. He emails, followed by a phone call, in which he may have to leave a message, and finally he sends a letter. It is highly unlikely that all three correspondences will not get through, but it could happen. However, I would never employ all three means because of the reaction on the part of the recipient. I don’t think it would be too accommodating. Yet, what choice do we really have?

As a writer, I certainly put down thoughts that I
should have held back. At times I do this for a laugh, but also to enlighten. Some people need to be exposed because of their behavior – either ethically or rationally. In early 2009, I became a big fan of Jay Leno and *The Tonight Show*. Jay tells it like it is, and at the end of 2008 and the beginning of the year 2009, he assaulted corporate America – especially the CEOs – the Governor of Illinois, Rod Blagojevich, Sarah Palin and that guy who made off with the money and infuriated many people. His name, appropriately enough, is Bernard Madoff. In his honor, New York City artist Alex Gardega is selling a habanero hot sauce called, “Bernie in Hell.” Leno’s comments on these people was just part of the monologue, offered to bring some laughter into our lives, and I might add, to inform us of what’s going on in the country. This is needed because the media has failed the public in what they should be doing. Maybe they figure we can’t handle the truth. This doesn’t bother Leno, as Jay pulls no punches while lambasting NBC, the network that pays him.

When you mention, “Tell it like it is,” one person who comes to mind is the late Howard Cosell, an individual that you either loved or hated. He was known primarily for *Monday Night Football*, which may never have been such a huge hit without him, and his relationship with Mohammed Ali, aka Cassius Clay. The two fed off each other and were responsible in some ways for the other’s success. Cosell pulled no punches and perhaps he should have uttered those words of Nicholson that grace the title of this chapter.

Another type of star that figures into this discussion is the stand-up comedian, who relies on character studies to
obtain laughs and a paycheck. So many comics force us to look at ourselves but some take it to another level altogether. Don Rickles is one of the attack people, who makes fun of just about everyone, at times in an abusive manner. To his credit, we know that he speaks to get a laugh – I have recalled some hysterical moments watching him, even in early 2009 when I roared – and he always remarks at the end that he was just kidding. In fact, he does that more than once during a performance. He is not the only one with this style of humor.

Another similar comedian, who had me laughing on so many occasions – I was blessed to see him in person at his club in New York many years ago – was the late Rodney Dangerfield. But he was different because he made fun of himself, with such lines as, “My wife likes to talk during sex; last night, she called me from her hotel.” Another gem he offered was, “I get no respect, even from my dog. The other day he was playing with a bone – it was in my finger.” Dangerfield saw that we’re all imperfect and should laugh at ourselves. He was similar to Rickles in many ways, but different in that he was the victim, so he spared his audience. Rodney, we miss you!

In my books, I’m not too kind with the government (legislative, judicial or executive), corporate America, with emphasis on the banks and management, and you are may be aware of my love for the publishing industry as well as my admiration for health care. You might agree with me that they all deserve it. My books on missing intelligence should put more than a smile on your face, but each of those books is really an attempt to convince people to use common sense
and not do things and then say, “What was I thinking?” Obviously, we have to laugh at ourselves, have concern for others’ feelings and not do things that we regret.

“To be perfectly honest with you” is a phrase that we hear too often. It falls into the class of words that brings terror – that word itself Bush-Cheney used to bring fear into our country – into the hearts of listeners. I talk about a few others in my books on missing intelligence, such as “We have to talk,” the reaction that the words “interesting” or “adventure” connote – they invoked other meanings not that long ago – as well as any response that begins well, but has the word “but” in it. We can’t forget the annoying three words, “You’ve got mail,” which really should be “You have mail,” although I would prefer “You have time-wasting spam,” or no reply at all.

The phrase that began the previous paragraph tells the listener, “Oh, oh, here it comes,” and no one wants to be subject to that treatment. However, you have to also look at it in another way because the person on the receiving end might wonder what this speaker’s intent was yesterday and what it will be tomorrow. Is he another politician, lawyer or salesman that only occasionally lets the truth fly? Finally I have to question the use of those two words, “perfectly” and “honest” together,” which is at the heart of what this chapter is all about.

Growing up, I was taught to respect my parents and authority. As a result, I kept my mouth closed when I really wanted to express my feelings on many occasions. My father had more to do with that than my mother, but strangely enough, my dad also instilled in his children that we should
question authority. I’m happy to report that he succeeded on both counts, which brings up one dilemma in regard to the closed mouth. Not saying anything means that it will be extremely difficult to communicate with anyone. Perhaps that’s why husbands don’t talk to their wives, and those who have experienced war clam up on their arrival back home. On the other hand, conversation – civilized or otherwise – will have repercussions in some way, so this idea of so much silence just won’t work.

Tied in to that scarcity of sound is a variation on the title of the chapter: “You can’t hear the truth.” When it comes to the priest / confessor relationship, the stifling of the broadcast of events is warranted. And yet, what about the situation in which lives could be saved by a revelation on the part of the clergy? A similar connection between an attorney and a client poses dilemmas as well. If a lawyer defends a client guilty of murder – everyone should be defended in court – and knows of the guilt, but tries to convince the jury that the defendant is innocent of the crime, isn’t that a gross distortion of the truth? I can see where secrecy is needed based on the relationship between the two and find that the attorney’s efforts to reduce a death penalty to life imprisonment is a noble cause, but that has little to do with veracity. It’s a matter of compassion.

The Deep Throat / journalist connection brings up another example of silence. On too many occasions, reporters have been asked to disclose their sources for information, when the person demanding this should have known better. One such revelation would forever prevent information reaching not only the journalist, who holds back
the name demanded, but any other newsperson again. Thus, we would still have a government, but no newspapers – or at least they would be rendered useless to society – and this was a choice that Jefferson warned us against when he said, “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

Newspapers, books and speech are all very important. From my experience, writing and otherwise – I’m sure you can attest to this as well – no matter what one says, someone may be offended. This is true even if what is offered is intended as a compliment. It shouldn’t be that way but on occasions I have made efforts to help others and show my concern, with a result that I didn’t expect. An outcome came about which had nothing to do with my actions, and I was blamed, or at least treated with that look. You’ve heard of senators who offered proposals to remedy some problem, only to be rejected with no proposal offered in return. What should have been the response was a statement saying that the idea was very good, but it could be improved upon by a few other possibilities. Too often, it seems that progressive ideas are attacked, rather than considered. Somehow we are engaged in war even without weapons when we should be thinking of negotiating – and that’s the truth.

An alternative title for this chapter could have been, “If you can’t say something nice.” These are the words of a blues tune I heard years ago at a bar in North Salem, New York. The words that complete it are, “Don’t say nothing at all.” I know: that’s two negatives and not the best English.
Nonetheless, it’s better advice than, “Always tell the truth.” Granted, this book is about truth and our search to achieve it, but once we arrive at it, there may be no need to tell the world, let alone one or two people who might not appreciate it.
2. Critics rave

I’m sure you’ve heard of reviewers panning books without opening them up – or at least reading no more than a page – as well as those who trash a movie without actually seeing it. This may be one reason why people aren’t that impressed by the critics, myself included. I have a book by the late Pauline Kael in which she reviews movies that came out before the mid 1980s. Since I view a great number of them – old as well as more recent releases – I refer to this book quite often. On occasion, an old flick that I have seen or am about to watch can’t be found in that treatise. This is a bit daunting, insofar as the motion picture, because of its popularity, is one that I expected her to review in that book.

Maybe I should read what she says first and if the movie is panned, I’ll probably like it. On other occasions, she has been right on the money, and I really enjoyed both the critique and movie. However, reality really hit home when she wasn’t that entertained by the 1965 offering, *The Sound Of Music*. Perhaps she just wasn’t a big fan of Julie Andrews or Christopher Plummer, or didn’t like yodeling, but I truly enjoyed that wonderful movie.

Another movie a few years after that one that she reviewed was the 1969 offering, *The Secret Of Santa Vittoria*. It starred Anthony Quinn and Anna Magnani, and I watched it in early 2009 on a cable channel in Buffalo with a new all-movie format. Perhaps Kael doesn’t like movies with Nazis, but I highly recommend this World War II flick because of the joy, hope and triumph, as well as the humanity in the picture, even in one of the aggressors.
Moreover, it’s a movie about lying, although we all know that when war arrives, the first thing lost is the truth. In this case – as with any war – people do things to save themselves, or something that means very much to them, even if it involves a million bottles of wine. Indeed, *The Secret Of Santa Vittoria* reminds us that the subject matter of this book isn’t quite as simple as it might first appear.

There are many issues with critics of all sorts. I certainly would not want to get paid for being a critic, whether of books, restaurants – even with free food – or the silver screen. This has to do with the fact that eating-places have mediocre food at times or entrees I’d rather avoid. For the other possibilities, you are forced to sit and watch every movie, not just the ones that might be appealing, and you probably would not have much of an option when it comes to the written word. This, of course, deals with the matter of taste.

Indeed, I tell people about books I like and others that I wasn’t thrilled reading – even mentioning that I only got to page ten – but that’s not the same as doing a review, which calls for objectivity. I mentioned in a previous book of mine that I departed a writers’ group in Buffalo for that very reason. Everyone is subjective when it comes to talking about a book or flick.

There are two types of critics: professionals and everyone else. Within the second grouping are people who buy the books and others who are given them without paying a cent. Books are gifts to people who will review them (the professionals) or someone or some organization that will help spread the word about your writing in a favorable way.
That, at least is the hope.

People in the book business have told me not to give any books away, but rather to charge for them, even if it happens to be a discounted price. I disagree with that philosophy because critics won’t review your books if they have to pay for them. Some, in fact, demand payment from you. The same idea applies with promoters, and family and friends may only open your books if they are gratis. However, just because you hand someone your book doesn’t mean they will review it, or even read it. This truth applies to an organization that does reviews.

From my experience with reviewers in the last six years, I feel that the best person to comment about what you have written is someone whom you may have never seen face-to-face, or met on but one occasion, say at a book signing. These individuals are the most sincere since they don’t know you from Adam. Since they purchased your book, there is a great possibility that they will actually read it – why buy something that you won’t read? One other requirement is needed, though: they convey their feelings before you ask them.

If nine out of ten people think your book is great, you’re on your way as a writer. On the other hand, if only one of ten expresses satisfaction with the writing, and that person is your spouse, you have work to do. In any event, I see no value in inquiring of someone if he liked my book.

Since my first book was published in November 2002, friends and family have heaped praise on my books. I value their comments, but others might be skeptical. Two individuals who loved my cookbook I had the pleasure of
meeting a few years ago. One was Lois Marie Gibbs – the Love Canal woman. She called my effort “a great, funny cookbook.” The other bought the book in the fall of 2005 at a book signing at Barnes and Noble. She initiated contact afterwards by emailing me her kind words, and in 2008 she posted a great review of that book at Amazon. I added the comments to my web site for the page I have on the book.

Not that long ago I also heard from Marie and Tricia of the National Park Service about my cookbook. They both loved it, even though they weren’t going to sell it in Grand Canyon or Great Basin National Park stores. I would never recognize either of the two on the street, since I never met them. My only dealings with them were through emails, and the same relationship applies to another person who bought my book. She used the words, “I got a kick out of it – couldn’t put it down until I finished it.” She lives about fifteen miles from my home and her name is Monica, so we know she can be trusted. The most gratifying thing is that she is referring to a cookbook.

Despite all these great comments on that book, there are others who bought or have a copy without paying for it, who haven’t offered any feedback. Either they didn’t care for it, they liked it but didn’t reply, they had no opinion on it or they simply haven’t opened it. Of all those who read the cookbook, only one person disagreed with the rave reviews from the others. That doesn’t mean that there weren’t a few individuals who didn’t feel the same way, only that they never let me know about their thoughts.

When I sell books at book festivals, bookstores or other types of venues, I ask the buyers to feel free to send me
comments on their purchase. Some do, but many don’t for various reasons. Perhaps they figure they will be providing an email address to which I can send spam. The lack of a reply doesn’t imply that they didn’t care for what I wrote, but doesn’t affirm that they liked it either. Of course, it really won’t accomplish much by begging them for a book review.

I should also add that for any book, you won’t find that every reader will rave over it. If so, something is amiss, and it doesn’t matter who wrote the book. This certainly applies to the critics and there have been occasions when those people wrote a review that may have left some writer abandoning the field of writing forever. Here, I’m referring to one occasion in which the reviewer did not care in the least for my creation. I figured that this person just didn’t get the book and what it was all about. Fortunately, most of these groups that review books for a living won’t send that bad review to Amazon, so you are spared the embarrassment.

I was fortunate and indeed blessed when the critics passed judgment on my first book. All three professional reviewers – none of whom I’ve met – praised the cookbook, each giving it five stars. Two things came out in those five-star reviews. One of the critics made up some facts in the book, which weren’t exactly true, thus destroying objectivity. Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not her own facts. In other words, that person wrote a lie, even if it wasn’t intended. Statements were made up based on the critic’s feelings. What was offered was that I didn’t like desserts and there was a mention of turkey bones in the spaghetti sauce caper that I unwillingly participated in with my friend Spike. The bones I used in the sauce were not
from any fowl but rather from the animal involved with that ever-present flu in 2009, and they weren’t likely to cause anyone any problems. I never said I wasn’t a fan of dessert but that I don’t eat many desserts – probably a good idea, healthwise.

The other issue about the lavish praise from the critics for the first book of any writer is that it establishes overconfidence. The person at the receiving end might thus conclude that this writing thing is easy. Unfortunately, that’s the furthest thing from the truth. Despite the triple triumph from the reviewers, I did mention a subsequent book that one reviewer wasn’t thrilled about and that person was from one of those same three organizations. It wasn’t the same individual who lavished the five-star rating, though.

Midwest Book Review has enjoyed my writing and probably will review just about anything I send them. That’s not to say they will think it’s top-notch, but at least someone will read the offering. You could say I have developed a reputation for writing decent works with a sense of humor. If I’m not mistaken, people send books for review to Midwest and they go onto a pile to be read and commented upon. If no one picks up the book, it simply doesn’t get reviewed. Thus, it seems as though you almost need a recommendation to have your first book reviewed. Once that happens, you may be on your way, but then one needs to consider the fact that now subjectivity enters the picture. It’s almost as though you are on a kind of Dean’s list and will get special treatment because of past efforts.

Other writers I know send their books to Midwest, but either they don’t get reviewed or else the books are only
given a two- or three-star review so that it never makes it to Amazon and the author sees nothing. I’m not really sure if anyone gets notified for mediocre comments on a book. Midwest is non-profit – I wonder how the reviewers get paid – and it’s illegal to send them any kind of contribution, for obvious reasons. However, you can send them United States postage stamps to help defray costs, but won’t that in some way affect objectivity?

There are other venues for obtaining book reviews but if your books are self-published, it won’t be easy. In fact, for a newspaper to even look at your writing may be like hoping for CEOs to return their undeserved bonuses. At the time of publication of my book on my journey as a writer, *I Don’t Want To Be A Pirate – Writer, maybe*, my editor emailed me asking if I had seen the cover of the *New Yorker Magazine*. I hadn’t, so I immediately proceeded to the appropriate web site and what I saw was a cover that would have been quite appropriate for that book. It had nine panels, with each of the steps in the writing process. I decided to send a copy of the book to that magazine, but as far as I know, nothing came of it. It may not have even been opened. I should add my subjective opinion that I wouldn’t have used their cover even if I had received permission since I think mine is better. You can’t tell a book by the cover but you can sell it by the cover as well as by the title – I have seen interest for my books at my signings. People on their way past my table pause to check out the pirate book in question, even if they don’t purchase a copy.

I also sent a copy to *Writers Digest* but it seems as though they don’t review self-published books, unlike
Midwest Book Review, which only critiques that type of book. I wasted a few dollars in that effort – live and learn. Obviously, having The New York Times, Washington Post or some other major organization review what you have written would be a great way of spreading the word – unless they completely tear it apart. If that happens and the books generally receive five star reviews, you might question the veracity of those critics. I certainly would.

I stick to the local press, The Buffalo News, but even working with them is fraught with frustration. I have talked to some of the head honchos at that paper – mostly by accident – but have really made no strides in obtaining reviews. The chief probably recycles my offering – that’s the good news, sort of. The bad news is he throws it into the circular file and does not hand it over to a reviewer. I have been in email contact with one of his staff, but she has yet to do the review thing on my books – she probably can’t do it without authorization. I believe she handed my business card over to Louise Continelli, who heard about my second book on work, which emphasizes the workweek and the minimum wage. I sent Louise a copy, which she loved, and she called me. In our discussion, I mentioned my book on the failure of technology, which I alluded to earlier. It was still in the manuscript stage, but soon to be published, so I sent her the unfinished product and a few months later, the book.

Louise wrote an extensive article in The Buffalo News on Monday, July 7, 2008. A few people read it, with one individual emailing me praise and kind thoughts and another one not anywhere near as gracious, which I smartly ignored. How does one write a nasty email to someone about
a book they haven’t even read? Don’t tell me this person broke into my PC or intercepted the manuscript on its way to Louise. I doubt that this critic will even read this, so I think I’m safe. Terri Foxman of Montreal also read the article, which was written three months before the book was published. She called me and we had a nice discussion on the manuscript since they were planning to do a documentary on our love / hate relationship with technology. Eventually I sent her copies of the book on work and the one on technology. Because of the economy and cutbacks, the last I heard was that the project was on hold.

Because of my work with the Cheektowaga Citizens Coalition (CCC), I was fortunate to meet Barbara O’Brien, another reporter from The Buffalo News. In the summer of 2005, she visited my home one Thursday, and interviewed me after reading my first book on missing intelligence – described by many people as hysterical. I was surprised to see the article three days later in the Sunday edition of the paper. It was well done and mentioned that book – it was obvious to me that she read it – as well as my other three books and my battles with cancer. Unfortunately, there was an incorrect fact in the piece. It wasn’t her fault, but mine, since I didn’t have a chance to look the article over before publication. In many cases newspapers don’t let you get involved with proofreading, perhaps because of time constraints. That’s what I surmise and it makes sense, but on some occasions, there’s plenty of time before publication for checking by the author. In this case, it really wasn’t my fault, as the blame rests entirely on a bookstore in the area for the discrepancy.
My web site lists places where my books can be purchased and so I listed this store. When the book came into print, I stopped in to the place with one copy for the person in charge. The publisher’s name was listed along with the ISBN, and that should have been sufficient for that individual to procure copies of the book. I was willing to give the store copies but was told that that would be counter to their policy. My delivery of the book was about a month before the article in the paper. On the Monday after I read Barbara’s feature on me, for some reason I called that same store, just to check if they had copies of the book. I was told that a few people stopped in for it but there were no copies available there for sale. When you’re just starting out as a writer, you don’t want to miss any opportunity to sell books, even one or two.

I made contact with the editor of a small newspaper in Western New York and she wrote a nice article about my 2007 book, *This Page Intentionally Left Blank*. I didn’t have a chance to look over what was written in advance and wished I could have, since there were a few things I would have modified. There was enough time for me to proofread the offering. I also gave her my next book and was hoping for a review since I had an upcoming book signing at Borders Books here. She didn’t write about it, but there was a four-line mention of the coming book signing. I doubt that many people saw it since my mom handed me the paper with the appropriate page and I wouldn’t have seen it if she hadn’t pointed it out to me.

I had an article written about my books by another small publication a few years ago that had many of the facts
right. A few just weren’t true – I was fortunate to read the offering before publication – so I mentioned what should be changed. On viewing the results after the alterations, there were still some inaccuracies. I decided to mention this to the person in charge, but he said that the paper was in the printing stage. He did promise that there would be another reprint of the article in another edition. Oh, great! I’m sure the person who wrote the piece will be pleased.

In another tale relating to my second book on work, Joe Hoffman of Lift Bridge Books in Brockport suggested having a panel discussion on the workweek and the minimum wage in early 2008, since the book had special emphasis on both topics. He posted fliers in the store and some mention of that day was listed in the local news. We assembled the panel and I set out to have something written about the book in a small local paper. One day the paper called me and asked if I could be interviewed. I said, “Yes, but not at the moment,” as I was out the door to my mom’s house on a mission. Before leaving, we agreed on a time the next day by phone and the journalist asked if the book was socialist. I was taken aback, so I didn’t answer right away, but eventually indicated that it wasn’t. The next day the same person called and gave me the news that the interview was off, the reason being he was reassigned to some other feature. I can only wonder if my answer to his question the day before had caused this action.

I was a bit wary about the panel discussion because of the unknown weather possibilities. I should have had other concerns since that January day the temperature was in the 50s, so I had no trouble driving back and forth. We did
have a lively discussion related to work and many of its ramifications, and my cousin Richard, who was on the panel, invited me to a dinner that was cooked for his wife by a friend, who was an excellent cook. The food was superb and everything else was great except for one thing that day. If it weren’t for the panel, Joe Hoffman, friends and relatives of the panel, there would not have been a single person at the event.

In *I Don’t Want To Be A Pirate*, I mentioned my adventures with the food store, Wegmans. I won’t get into all the details but only summarize events. After donating four cookbooks and spending numerous hours trying to get that book into their stores, I finally received a decision from a woman named Donna. She said they wouldn’t be carrying my book in their stores. I’m not sure why, but I asked her if she had read the book, and she replied in the negative. I have already mentioned that it’s really difficult to assess a book without opening it. Putting it near your pillow at bedtime and relying on osmosis won’t work.

Not one to give up easily, after the great review of my book that gave many of the details of that last encounter, I dropped off a copy of that 2008 book to the downtown branch of the Buffalo Public Library. I believe that was in June of 2008. As the year approached its end, I heard from no one about whether they would buy the book and I had a few others that I wanted to submit there. I contacted the library by email but the response seemed to be one from the twentieth century – I’m not sure for whom this reply was intended, but it didn’t answer my question. I called and was told to email my question using the “ask us” idea on their
site, which is precisely what I had tried, with no success. I mentioned this and after much too long a time was told that they wouldn’t be carrying my book. I then mentioned the other new books of mine, but was informed that they didn’t deal with self-published books. This was a lie since The Celestine Prophesy, by James Redfield, was that type of book and moreover, a friend of mine, and author, Larry Beahan, has at least two books in the Buffalo library system, which are self-published. Perhaps their policy recently changed, but a few weeks after that, Teresa of the Independent Book Publishers Association mentioned that libraries obtain self-published books from distributors. Should I trust what I read in all those books I borrow from the library?

Long before this encounter, I had given the library a copy of my cookbook and my novel. After an extensive period of time, they passed on each one, and I’m not sure if they opened either, meaning they hadn’t read them, unless they did it by a process I don’t know about. They offered three comments about the novel, confirming the fact that no one had read it. They said there wasn’t sufficient character development, probably basing that statement on the fact that I needed more adjectives. A person in a work of fiction is understood by his actions and not the leisure suits he wears – although that attire does have some significance. I forget their last criticism but the second one was that the print was inferior. If you open the book, you will plainly see that the comment belonged for some of the books in the library system – some of those that I have checked out – as I could list a few classics where reading them was a bit of a
challenge because of the print.

As far as book reviews go, there are critics who seem to use generic reviews on occasion. They have a set review of a few sentences, which can describe just about any book that was ever written. All that has to be done is to replace a few words here and there and the commentary is finished – it certainly isn’t very conclusive and I don’t condone it, but I really hope these people don’t get paid.

Along the same lines, consider what could be said at a eulogy. This is something I thought of one evening while resting.

“There is no question that there will never be another person like John Smith. His actions over the last few years are such that his wife and sons will never forget him. Those of us who knew him concur that at this moment, he is in a place where he should be.” Does this last comment refer to Hitler or Gandhi?

Something that I have actually seen isn’t much different from the commentary of a book reviewer. This is done by people who don’t have the time to write a review. Apparently they haven’t read either of my books on work, which has quite a few suggestions on how to secure more free time. The scenario starts out with the critic asking the writer of the book to compose a blurb that will suffice for the review. Once completed, the reviewer then looks at it and either approves of it as is, or adds something more – maybe making a few changes – to give the review more clout. I won’t complain since it has the potential to sell more books, something a missing review can’t do.

Reviews of my books can be found at my web site
and a smaller number of them at Amazon.com. I was told that to obtain more exposure as a writer, you need five five-star reviews on your books there. In an endeavor to test this theory, I asked people to proceed to that website and write a few sentences on a book or two of mine that they read, giving it the highest rating. In return, I promised them a copy of a book of mine that they didn’t possess. As a result, if you proceed to Amazon.com, you can see some five-star reviews for the books I have published to date, including three of the books having at least the required five write-ups. It is only a matter of time before I determine if this exercise will bear any fruit. I have my doubts. Unfortunately, people did promise to do the review thing at Amazon, but have yet to fulfill their commitment, and it has been a few months and I’m still waiting.

From my years of writing and receiving comments on my books, it seems that there is no easy way of obtaining reviews and even those of the critics will be reflective of some type of subjectivity. After all, as pointed out by Barbara Kingsolver in a wonderful book of essays, Small Wonder, critics are human beings and everyone faces a bad day from time to time. This has to affect what a critic will write. Objectivity is almost impossible to achieve. It just can’t be helped.

On Saturday, February 21, 2009, I received a thank you note for sending a company that reviews books, my 2008 offering, Take Back The Earth – The Dumb, Greedy Incompetents Have Trashed It. Someone there saw a review of the book by Midwest Book Review – even before I caught sight of it – and sent a letter saying that if I sent them a copy,
they might review it. I didn’t like the word *might*, but I sent them a copy anyway, figuring it didn’t cost me that much to do so. This thank you note arrived about two weeks later and they mentioned that I hadn’t sent a media kit with the book. That may have been intentional for reasons that will soon be obvious. In the correspondence were these words, more or less: “Most editors are so busy that they really don’t have time to read books that they will be reviewing. They obtain information from the media kit, which includes a book synopsis, reviews, press release, biography of the author and price, ISBN, the number of pages and other relevant information.” I wasn’t shocked to read this, but it confirmed my suspicions – which I brought out in this chapter about book reviews. You’ll note that the words in quotes in this paragraph are not verbatim since I don’t want to get locked up for plagiarism. I should add that they did review the book – they read the book – and gave it a stellar evaluation.
3. LWL, BBL and ETC

LWL is the acronym for little white lies, while you can figure out what BBL represents. If not, it’s big black lies. If you read my 2008 book, **wake up – it’s time for your sleeping pill**, you know what the last acronym in the chapter title means. It’s not what you may have envisioned, though in some ways your idea is close. It goes back to an episode on television when Tom Smothers uttered three words that he could say rather than a single word that wouldn’t make it past the censors. The phrase was El Toro Crappo, and I believe that substitution garnered more laughs than the two syllable word referring to waste from a farm animal.

At first, I was reluctant to see *I Am Sam*, the movie starring Sean Penn. However, once I began viewing the DVD, I was glad I did. The movie is about disabilities – each one of us has at least one – and seeing others in a different light. It embraces love and the fact that a person can be smarter in some ways than supposed geniuses. When Rita, the pro-bono attorney played by Michelle Pfeiffer, asks Sam if he didn’t mind tweaking the truth just a bit in the courtroom, he said that he wouldn’t do it. Sam speaks the truth and really can’t find it in himself to do anything else, when it comes to honesty. Above all, he is truly a teacher.

Whether it’s small – tweaks are included here – medium-sized, big, super-sized or merely ETC, it’s still an untruth. We see so many examples of each of these distortions in our everyday lives, but people have motives for their actions. On many accounts, the choice made could be the best one for many reasons since this matter of truth is not
easily accommodated. A few more examples should convince you further. If I believe something to be true and I tell others of it, even though it’s a lie, have I told the truth?

Not long ago, my editor gave me a book of the poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld. The guy was good for something after all. There was one quote in the book that I mentioned earlier, attributed to him: “Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.” In one of his books, I found that same quote – more or less – by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. I used one of Rumsfeld’s more common quotes – also found in that short book – in my 2005 book, but unfortunately there was a mistake which flew right past the editors and proofreaders. Does that make liars out of these checkers, myself included? I will delve more into the issues of truth, writers, editors and proofreaders in a later chapter.

Suppose I am late in arriving with groceries at my mom’s house. She asks where I was and I reply, “The car wouldn’t start.” If the real reason it wouldn’t turn over is that it’s difficult to turn the key while you’re in bed, would that be an untruth? I’ve also mentioned to others a fun thing to do when a telemarketer calls you and asks for your wife and you’re not married. If you reply, “She’s not home,” would that be a lie? If the caller then inquires as to when she would be on the premises and you say, “That’s hard to say,” what about that?

If your spouse asks you if she looks fat, and you say, “The day of our marriage you were gorgeous, and today you are beautiful, no different from the day that we were wed,” is that reply any more truthful than, “Think of it this way, you’ll have more power positioning at four in the morning at
the Black Friday sale”? Another statement that could be true but should be avoided is, “Well, when you sit around the house, you really sit around it.” I would advise using the first reply and not even consider the last two. If someone asks you if you still beat your wife and you reply, “None of your business,” is this preferable to, “Of course – every morning I wake up at five and she doesn’t get up until six”? Some questions should never be asked.

If you are a student and pit bull Pete places a disgusting blob of animal or human waste on the instructor’s chair – real or a reasonable facsimile – and the teacher asks for information on this action and you keep your mouth closed, have you committed an untruth? You may have refrained from revealing the culprit for security reasons – your own. The other factor has to do with being a snitch, but you may be detained after school with the rest of your unhappy classmates. This truth thing certainly can become complicated.

All these deviations from the truth are better known as lies. Someone used the term, *a little bit pregnant*, but if you’re with child, one word suffices and the other words are redundant. This same consideration applies to untruths, which can bombard us from everywhere. The media has been known to make us consider why we left our boots – deep, hip ones – at home and I won’t waste time with the networks, with their slanted reporting. The printed word delivered to us or available at the newsstand has, on a few occasions, spread false rumors. You’ve heard of Jayson Blair, a reporter so creative that he could cover a story without even traveling to the scene of the crime. His
Burning Down My Masters’ House: My Life At The New York Times is a fascinating book, which I recommend – proof that he can write.

I could spend an entire chapter on politicians, but let me just mention a few names: Foley, Craig, Cheney, Bush, Abramoff, Frist, Jefferson, Cunningham – and I don’t mean Richie – DeLay, Rove, Stevens (as in bridges to nowhere), Sanford, Atwater and Ashcroft. Keep in mind that these names are pertinent to the title of the chapter, so you really need to know the corresponding first name. When it comes to government, the way the system is set up, in order to be elected, you really can’t completely tell the truth. Many people won’t vote for you, resulting in you not being elevated to the office to which you are aspiring. For someone who does make it, on too many occasions, power overcomes the office and a competent, decent person changes, and not for the better. This is done because a politician has to go along, which means compromising her principles, in order to keep up her approval ratings and / or stay in office. It shouldn’t be that way. This is one of the reasons why the United States needs more than two major parties.

In January 2009, I read a book by Jerry Mander – another name that creative parents came up with – entitled, Four Arguments For The Elimination Of Television. Rather than talk about the possibility of untruth gracing the wide-screen and the flat screen televisions in our home, I would direct your attention to this book. Unfortunately, our nation of zombies has been hoodwinked into unhealthy habits in addition to spending money on too many things that
they don’t need and which don’t live up to expectations. I am referring to products, with special emphasis on drugs – over-the-counter and otherwise.

The corporations should be mentioned here for so many reasons. The recent bailout and the Wall Street mess are nothing more than numerous lies and deception in order to profit. During the last part of 2008, I finished reading two books that probably will depress you, which speak of big business greed. I recommend both *The Secret History Of The War On Cancer* by Devra Davis and *Poisoned Nation: Pollution, Greed And The Rise Of Deadly Epidemics* by Loretta Schwartz-Nobel. The former has much to say about the cigarette companies and their lies, which many in the healing profession went right along with, some knowingly. One group of people that I question when it comes to sickness are the societies and organizations that ask for your money to cure a disease – which is a good thing – except that it would be financially more beneficial to determine the causes and eliminate them. Also, for years and years, we contribute to a cause to find a remedy to end a specific disease, and yet none has been found. Where is all the money being spent?

The Schwartz-Nobel treatise blames all the polluters that sell products that don’t help the consumer or the planet, but in the process, use up valuable resources that could have been used for something that would have an impact on our lives. At the same time, the people who offer their time to create this horrible product are the individuals who experience sickness, or even worse, give up their lives for the corporate balance sheet. From the complete title of my
book on the environment, it’s obvious that I have more to say about this. The recommended reading list at the end of that book has other books that tie in to what corporations have done to the earth and the lies they expounded along the way. I applaud writers, and especially Davis and Schwartz-Nobel for their effort and courage, but remind people that each book, though informational and revealing, is not for the squeamish.

Another appropriate area to discuss here is education. Consider a school that has thirteen different grades – that sounds unlucky to me. Starting at the bottom, they are F, D-, D, D+ all the way up to A+. How does a teacher distinguish between a B- and a B student? This seems to be a good opportunity for prejudice and untruths. With a mere five grades from A to F, the difficulty still isn’t eliminated.

While studying at the School of Advanced Technology (SAT) at Binghamton University in the early 1970s – almost forty years ago – our program surpassed even the progressive schools that worked on a pass / fail basis. SAT awarded credits for a course taken, or it was though you never registered for it. You might feel that everyone succeeded, but that was only true if you did the assignments. If you failed in that regard, you managed to waste money, even though tuition at the time was so much less than today. Nevertheless, that amount was no small change at the time, and students in the program made sure that their hard-earned cash wasn’t squandered.

Most grading systems today are a lie including the No Child Left Behind Program, which I think would be better suited to the label, No Child’s Behind Left. This idea is a
huge failure and untruth, since it has replaced teaching with testing. If a teacher gives out a full period test every Friday, he will spend Thursday reviewing the material beforehand and the following Monday going over the test. This means he is actually spending two days instructing the students, on Tuesday and Wednesday. If our youth are taught to the test, they may succeed on the day of evaluation, but a month later will they have any recollection of what they learned before the test?

At the university level – but this applies elsewhere, too – many students are great at taking tests, while others struggle to comprehend the material. The former may not be so lucky at learning. A grade of A in college only means that the student succeeded in giving back to the professor everything he presented in class – well, at least all that was demanded of him on the exam. This has very little to do with the truth that school is a time for increasing knowledge that will endure. This is the kind that will serve our youth when they depart the area that, itself, needs revamping.

We can look at history class to see another connection of education to the theme of the chapter. I’m sure that you have looked back on a few sessions there and it almost seemed as though a certain type of male farm animal had been close by. Years ago, we were taught about the Native Americans or about slavery and now realize that our history book just didn’t get it right. This same concern could be applied to other classes, although certainly not math class, since it’s a pure science, or at one time was considered to be. Unfortunately, things have changed and the new math seems to have been replaced by close-enough or bizarro math.
Today, the emphasis is not on learning the logic, but students can pass if they come close to the answer. How he or she arrived at it pales in comparison to being in the neighborhood. Mathematics is no longer very pure, but you can see that no subject is exempt from being polluted in some way.

The lies come at us from everywhere and from all parts of life. They may be of different shapes and sizes but they are still untruths. They can have many effects, some devastating and others only of minor consequence, but they just can’t be avoided. We have huge challenges ahead of us since we have to separate the wheat from the chaff, which we need to do in our everyday lives, whether in our business endeavors or in dealing with friends and family.

With each passing year, I realize that many people say things are just aren’t true. On many occasions, it’s quite obvious that they’re patronizing or trying to impress you, but you soon realize their deceit. On many of my book signings in 2009, there seemed to be more of this than usual – maybe that’s because I had quite a few of these events, unlike past years. In many instances, seeing the lies is not that difficult. At other times, we realize that the truth is difficult to obtain and maybe it’s time for ETC repellent.
4. A writer’s concern with truth

If you’re familiar with my writing, you know that as of now, I have twelve books published. Anyone who puts his words into print has concern for the truth, no matter what type of books he writes. If you write science fiction, you probably have the most leeway, as just about anything goes – except for historical science fiction. When it comes to truth in that one area described as cuisine, you might figure that what can be found inside is the best example of truth. I’m not so sure about this conclusion as I have seen a few examples of deception when it comes to food in print.

Some time ago, someone put together a cookbook – probably quite boring – featuring delicious recipes. I use that last adjective because he or she plagiarized the recipes from Gourmet magazine, with which I am quite familiar, and can attest to their excellence. Recipes can’t be copyrighted, so the only way plagiarism can take place is if nothing is changed from the original recipe. In this instance, the thief took it word for word, ingredient by ingredient. If you find a recipe you like, you can easily modify it and call it your own by simply adding something or just removing the salt. It’s not that difficult. And yet, someone was so lazy, they didn’t even bother to do that.

You probably know that I’m a huge fan of Seinfeld. I’m talking about Jerry and not his wife, Jessica. In 2007, she came out with a cookbook, Deceptively Delicious: Simple Secrets To Get Your Kids Eating Good Foods, which stirred some controversy. The book became a best seller, with a boost in sales from Jessica’s appearance on The Oprah
Winfrey Show. Perhaps the first two words of the title are entirely appropriate because a number of readers posting on Amazon.com, Oprah.com and other a few other web sites, have indicated that there were many likenesses between Seinfeld’s book and a cookbook published earlier in the year by Running Press, an imprint of the Perseus Books Group. As I emphasized before, it takes very little to make a recipe your own.

The third example goes back to the writers’ conference I attended in 2002 in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. At that event, I met a writer who seems to have done quite well writing authentic, historical cookbooks. I believe he had a Revolutionary War treatise on food and one or more from the Civil War. I never looked into his books so I can’t say that much more about them, but I imagine he had a recipe of the time along with a story or two that went along with it. In May 2008, I was fortunate to be a part of the Philadelphia Book Festival and met another writer, Bob O’Connor, whose writing I mentioned in my 2008 book on war. O’Connor writes novels about the Civil War and Bob mentioned to me something about this other writer. He indicated that the authentic cookbook guy on occasion has tagged his book covers with some type of award sticker, not unlike the Indie Excellence Finalist Award on a few of my books. However, his award is from an organization that just doesn’t exist. With that in mind, you might question whether his recipes originated so many years ago, or in a kitchen with a microwave oven.

Not that long ago, I was informed that my first book, The Read My Lips Cookbook: A Culinary Journey Of
Memorable Meals was political. This was news to me and you would think that an author knows what he has written. I wouldn’t rely too much on the person who came up with that judgment, since I’m sure the individual never read the book. I believe this mislabeling of my book has to do with the title. This indicates that you shouldn’t judge a book by the title on the cover, since I mention neither Democrats nor Republicans in the book. I will admit that my web site has a recipe for chicken Republican soup, but that was created after the cookbook was published.

I’ve already honed in on the recipe copyright issue, so let me add that any recipe that you encounter is a refinement of some existing recipe. There are only a few basic recipes, such as bread, dessert, meat dishes with lamb, beef, fowl, pork or game, those without meat, soup, salad and appetizer. Any part of the meal will be a derivation of these. Changing a recipe to make it your own can be as simple as varying the amount of the herb added or altering the way the dish is prepared. Since I believe in easy, healthy recipes that are delicious, I simplify the creation process in order to improve it. My recipes have been inspired by Gourmet magazine, James Beard, food I have eaten away from home and recipes I clipped from magazines or newspapers, so each is authentic. I’m sure you know what that means! Each recipe found in my cookbook was personally tested before the book was published.

Between my recipes you will find anecdotes of my journey in the kitchen. Not all of these adventures are things to write home about, but fine for a cookbook, since they are meant to teach others what not to do. Along with that are a
host of ideas for making your life easier while preparing food. Since both the recipes and the stuffing are authentic, you might feel that my cookbook reeks of veracity. Before settling on that conclusion, I include an excerpt that ends chapter five with a laugh.

“I had some friends over from work for dinner some time ago. I made some French onion soup and commented that the hardest part was slicing the onions. One of the consequences was that the eyes tend to fill with tears from the onions. Frank, being the perfect straight man, mentioned that he heard that peeling them underwater was supposed to help. I said, ‘I tried that but I almost drowned.’”

As you can guess, I made up the last six words to entertain so I was exaggerating. I have included one recipe that I especially like and people rave about, whenever I make it.
Raisin Rye Bread

Makes 3 loaves

| 1 bottle dark beer | 3 tbsp. caraway seeds |
| ½ cup molasses | ½ cup raisins, soaked in hot water and drained |
| olive oil | 2 cups rye flour |
| 2 packages dry yeast | 4 cups white flour |
| 1 cup lukewarm water | 1 tbsp. sugar |

In a small saucepan on medium heat put the beer, molasses and 1/4 cup of the olive oil. Stir occasionally and remove after 5 minutes. Pour into a large mixing bowl and cool. Proof yeast in water with sugar. When beer mixture is lukewarm, add the yeast mixture, caraway seeds and raisins. Add rye flour and stir vigorously. Add as much white flour as necessary to make a stiff dough. Roll the dough onto a floured board and knead for about 2 minutes. Wash and dry the mixing bowl and grease with olive oil. Put dough into the bowl, cover with a damp towel and place in a warm oven to rise until double in bulk, about 1 hour. Turn dough onto a floured board and cut the dough in half. Form 2 round loaves and put on a greased cookie sheet. Cover with a damp towel and put into oven and let rise for about 40 minutes or until double in size. Bake in a 375-degree oven for 45 minutes. Remove to a wire rack and cool. Serve.

If you look very closely, you’ll see two numbers in bold Italics. At the top, it says that the recipe makes three loaves, while close to the bottom, instructions indicate a result of two loaves. Since Christ wasn’t on the scene to multiply the loves – I know, I’m fishing for a laugh, here –
it’s quite obvious that there is an error or untruth here, which snuck past the editors and proofreaders. In this case, I had two of the former and one of the latter, but I also served in both roles, so we all missed it, and I’m sure you’ll find other errors, not unlike what you will encounter in just about any book you read. No matter what company publishes a book, there will be some mistakes. It just can’t be avoided, unless either the book was a short one – under ten words. The process of having people continue to search for mistakes implies that the book will never get published and the ten-word offering probably won’t sell – not enough plot. I have to conclude that my cookbook definitely is not political and it smacks of no lies.

The second book I wrote, *Don’t Bet On It*, which is my only novel to date, and perhaps the only one I’ll ever write, raises different issues. Since it’s fiction, there’s less concern about the facts. I consider it to be historical fiction, since I have included many statistics and facts about lotteries, including enough information to make the reader feel that he may be better off buying a six-pack of beer than buying a lottery ticket. The actual story as I related it didn’t occur, but it certainly could have, and though the characters aren’t real, they are based on actual people. The aspect of the book dealing with computers is genuine, as my involvement with those time-savers can verify.

In the summer of 2007, I met a writer who mentioned that he saw very little distinction between fiction and non-fiction. I had to agree with him for a few reasons and perhaps there should be no distinction. After all, since truth is stranger than fiction, when you finish reading a novel based
on a true story, you wonder how much of it is true. For a work of non-fiction, there will be many times when you ask if all of this is the truth. You’d have the same concern had there been no classification of the book.

A few books that I should mention illustrate this further. Gerald Posner wrote *Case Closed* about the assassination of JFK. I’ll talk more about conspiracies later, but this book affirms that Lee Harvey Oswald was solely responsible, and we need look no further into the events surrounding November 22, 1963. There’s more truth in Don DeLillo’s 1988 novel, *Libra*, but you won’t find much more information – the book is too long for my taste – than in other books on the assassination. In 2004, a group of people came out with *Unfit For Command: Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry*, which was debunked by the Boston Globe, so it qualifies as ETC. I didn’t read the book but I don’t read that much fiction. This book couldn’t even classify as historical fiction. I don’t believe the authors of that book were that swift.

One book I did read and recommend was *The Boo* by Pat Conroy. The subject of the book was Thomas Nugent “The Boo” Courvoisie, Commandant of Cadets at The Citadel. Conroy had the pleasure of attending that wonderful institution, so he knew the person in his book. Courvoisie may have frightened the cadets, but he had their respect and was really concerned for each of them. Though classified as fiction, I think the book is in the wrong category.

Another book I read a few months ago was Al Franken’s account of his sojourn in the White House, *Why Not Me? The Inside Story Of The Making And Unmaking*
Of The Franken Presidency, which is classified as non-fiction. Since I don’t remember him being inaugurated – maybe I missed it – that book is definitely misclassified. I call that to the attention of the people in charge, but I recommend the book for a few laughs. Franken won election to the Senate in 2008, although it took almost eight months for the results to be tabulated. There are hundreds of other books that have been written which are on the wrong section of shelves in bookstores as well as in the library.

Because I was a teacher, all of my books are self-help with a generous topping of humor. Beside the first two, which I described, the remaining ones fall into two categories. Three are about language, laughter and lunacy, with emphasis on missing intelligence. The rest are about social justice issues, specifically war, the environment, writing, technology and the minimum wage.

The two books dealing with work chronicle my experience in the business world, with my experience being the research, so it has authenticity. This War Won’t Cost Much – I’m Already Against The Next One took years to write and has twenty-two pages of references, not to mention the list of movies that I viewed and mentioned throughout the treatise. Press 1 For Pig Latin – the book whose title might indicate a fun happening for children – is filled with laughs, but is all about the failure of technology and what we can do to fix matters. My degree in computer science lends the highest credence to the sections dealing with computers – email, the internet and all the frustration that so many others suffer because of PCs – but I have seen the effects of television, the telephone, the automobile and gunpowder, so
the other topics are researched as well. With each passing
day, I am convinced that this book is right on the money.
Technology seems to be worsening rather than improving
our lives. In the spring of 2009, I finished reading an
excellent book on how computers and the internet are
creating a society of young people that doesn’t bode well for
humanity. *The Dumbest Generation: How The Digital Age
Stupifies And Jeopardizes Our Future*, by Mark Bauerlein,
is a book with plenty of warning. The title says it all, but
each of us needs to read it and obtain more insight.

The more books I write, the more research goes into
them and I accumulate more life experience. When it comes
to those three books on missing intelligence, you may feel
that there is no concern about the truth issue, since they
strive for laughs while simultaneously pointing out the dumb
things people say and do. In writing *for seeing eye dogs
only*, I collected quotes, stories of criminal behavior and
other pieces with a few names included therein. Around the
time the manuscript was being finished, I was concerned
about accuracy, at least to some extent. To avoid litigation
and also to remove the problem of considering the veracity
of any anecdote, I created bogus names. This turned out to be
an added bonus since more humor was injected into the
narrative. I also felt that it was a good gesture on my part to
spare the people, who because of their actions, had been put
through enough punishment already – some even requiring
hospitalization.

Much of the material for that book I collected from
emails, and some of the anecdotes seem quite unbelievable,
so much so that one begins to question their authenticity.
Having not revealed any names – except those creations of my mind – it truly didn’t matter, since hilarity was the desired result. Above all, so many of these bits and pieces seemed possible, because of what people can say and do. As far as some of the quotes, I had a few doubts because one quote was attributed to Al Gore – I saw it in some book, which itself could have been in error – and another book listed those words flowing from the mouth of George W. Bush. Maybe they both uttered the phrase or perhaps neither one did. That was fine since I didn’t have to worry who said it. That book did have a misquote from the lips of a politician when I used the word, unknowns, when I should have used the word knowns. Oh, those editors and proofreaders that let mistakes slip by them!

If you’ve been to my web site, you know that one word that you can find on the home page is excellence. My use of at least two editors and two or more proofreaders for each of my books helps to reach that level, since my goal in every book of mine that comes into print is to minimize the number of mistakes that readers will find. You can’t eliminate them all, as I have pointed out, but diligence results in few, if any, errors. I watched a great PBS show a few months ago about writing, in which a newspaper publisher commented that bringing a newspaper into print each day was the equivalent of publishing a book. Thus, don’t be that surprised when you see words in a newspaper or book that shouldn’t be there, or missing words here and there. At times, I have read books produced by the most affluent publishers with so many mistakes that I can only conclude that they rushed to have the book published – not
my idea of excellence.
5. History detectives and historians

You could have the best editors and proofreaders, but it will do you no good if all they do is check for grammar and punctuation. Since the spring of 2002 – when I began preparing my cookbook for publication, I have used about a half-dozen editors and about the same number of proofreaders. A few of these people are top-notch but others have missed too many obvious mistakes. Even the best checkers won’t find everything that’s wrong, but on one occasion I paid the editor and realized I would have to find another and do some editing myself, since he missed so much that had to be made right. With diligent people, there is a further requirement: as the author, you need to do a great amount of research. This is something that your editor could do, but since you wrote the book, you can’t expect her to know more about the topic than you do. If so, she would have written her own book on the subject.

One of the most popular programs on PBS is Antiques Roadshow. I’m not one of its fans as I think it is too materialistic and also not very truthful. You’ll hear someone tell the appraiser that she spent thirty dollars for the item and then ask what it’s worth. Hearing that it might be worth four thousand dollars results in jubilation, while a comment that it would probably fetch twenty dollars will result in disappointment. Each answer is based on what someone will pay for the “treasure.” This reminds me of the sign that we saw as kids: We buy junk; sell antiques. Indeed, this show is all about investigation, but I prefer another show that you may have seen on that same network. History Detectives also
does checking in the same vein as the aforementioned flea market fiasco, but without the cash-craving citizens. Loaded with various credentials, Wes Cowan (auctioneer, appraiser), Elyse Luray (appraiser, art historian), Gwen Wright (professor of architecture, author, architectural advisor) and Tukufu Zuberi (professor of sociology, author) each week set out on a journey to investigate the authenticity of some document or artifact. At the end of the study, after a great deal of checking and talking to people in the know, they don’t always come to a definite conclusion about what gem they are asked to research. The added bonus is that not only are these four individuals investigators, they are also teachers – history, as you might expect.

The members of this quartet, as well as those appraisers on The Antiques Dog and Pony Show, are authenticators. Those researchers from the traveling road show arrive at a price for an object, whereas Wes, Elyse, Gwen and Tukufu are more concerned with the history of an artifact. They also will not commit to a definite conclusion if they are not absolutely convinced of the facts. For that, they are to be applauded. All these appraisers are searching for truth and the same can be said for an inquiring writer.

In April 2002, when I attended a writers’ conference, one of the bits of advice that we were told is that you should write what you know. This was not the first time and I’m sure it won’t be the last that this advice is offered. I mentioned the cookbook, but in all my books, I chronicle my journey as a writer as well as my adventures in the business world and my involvement in environmental concerns. I relate what I’ve either experienced, know or with which I
became familiar. This last designation is nothing more than research or investigation.

Relating what you have lived is the truth, unless you’re a Hollywood producer. Coming to conclusions based on your experience certainly isn’t a lie, but may not be reality, depending how you state it in your book. Adding some verification to back up what you say from your delving into the subject matter by way of reading, lends more credibility to what you put on paper. This forces us to not only look around and absorb matters, but also to take advantage of the media and what they expound, which you can find by reading and listening. Newspapers, magazines and information from the internet are fine, but you need to be cautious because not everything you find through those sources is entirely credible.

Blogs may give you information, but may be a far cry from the truth. The word itself, blog is an abbreviation of web log, but sometimes we may be led to believe that the term should be bslog. Recently, I added my face to facebook.com in an effort to spread the word on my books. There are so many of these networks – some good and others not that great – but in general, Facebook is a group of people who probably need more hobbies. Relying on blogs and even Wikipedia for facts should be accompanied by a second opinion. The reliability of blogs in many cases is not much better than that of newspapers. Even the so-called reputable publications have problems at times. I have already mentioned Jayson Blair, but he wasn’t a pioneer with his capers. Nevertheless, he gave the industry a bad reputation by his action. A much more despairing thought is that there
are journalists still at their place of employment who committed even worse crimes by their distortions of the truth, without being found out. I won’t mention any papers by name, but some of our leading newspapers have delivered news that wasn’t fit to print. I must add that there have been and continue to be top-notch reporters who would give their lives and actually aren’t slack on the job in getting to the truth.

Editorializing is fine, but you have to keep in mind that it isn’t something to rely on in your research. Newspapers have changed over the years, becoming an entertainment agenda. That may be fine for our amusement and certainly an improvement over reality TV, but sitcoms may have fewer lies than what you encounter in the news. I won’t even get into the tabloids, although they do have a few good laughs. I see much humor in the headlines each day and if you didn’t watch *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, he’s on today in prime time at 10 o’clock. Each Monday he still has the segment on headlines, which I think is hysterical, but evidence that people should do more proofreading. He requested submissions from viewers. My last two books on missing intelligence – both published in 2008 – have an entire chapter on those things that grace the newspaper in bold print, so I sent him a copy of each book.

Information can be obtained from various media sources – I hope they’re reliable – archives and books. As I pointed out, even a novel may have a great deal of history revealed, even more so than a work of non-fiction on the same subject. So then, how does a writer – or anyone else, for that matter – find out the facts? Keep in mind the
admonition that an author should write what she knows. If she is writing a treatise on The Civil War, most likely she didn’t experience it firsthand. Thus she will have to do research, referring to books, but that may not give any new insight. Information could be obtained by reading stories in newspapers of the time as well as from diaries and memoirs. Digging is important, but doesn’t guarantee absolute truth when the work comes into print. After all, we’ve seen many instances of late where the press messed up the story, but that could also have been the case in the nineteenth century. Letters and memos might be helpful, but a missing one might diminish the importance of the others and not help us uncover the truth.

Earlier, I mentioned our days in school, when the history books were a bit off at times. Merely consider what we learned about the Wild West. The people who were there before the European settlers were not only driven from their land, but they were made promises that were never kept, and even worse, murdered in the name of expansionism. We have been led to believe that the Sioux nation was a group of barbarians and a people of war, when that was the furthest thing from the truth. An excellent book that I finished reading in January 2009 is *Lame Deer Seeker Of Visions: The Life Of A Sioux Medicine Man*, a collaboration of John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes. The former was a medicine man of great wisdom, born over a century ago on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. He emphasized that his people comprised a community of peace, and that technology had the potential for destroying mankind, along with the planet, if not controlled. He was way ahead of his
time in that judgment.

Those who wrote some of the books for us in school had it wrong, indicating that historians could have the same difficulties. This includes those of the past as well as those of the twenty-first century. If we can’t completely trust them, how do you find the truth? The secret is that we need to look at various sources for information, and especially not overlook the power of books. In my 2008 book on my journey as a writer, one of the bits of advice to any author or those who are thinking about being one – and this really should not be limited to those people – is to read as much as you can. I emphasize that books have the truth. As I pointed out, some are ETC, but even within those, you can be blessed with some insight.

Non-fiction as well as fiction – remember the power of historical fiction – can provide answers. One can’t limit oneself to reading only novels, especially with all the trash out there. As I mentioned, some books classified as non-fiction aren’t much better when it comes to what really happened. I have already stated that most of the books I read are non-fiction, so I probably should pick up a few more novels. If you read only non-fiction, you may get depressed. I know that, at times, I can’t proceed very far in certain books, such as those on cancer, and I have a tough time with many books on war. Nevertheless, if you write about a subject, you need to do plenty of research, no matter how painful that may be. I mentioned two books that I read at the end of 2008 in their entirety on what the corporations have done to the environment and the health of the citizens therein. At another time, I could not have gotten past page
There is good news, though. I believe that it’s difficult to hide the truth, unless you have a poker face. Even those individuals will eventually break down. We know all about perfect crimes. You may not have heard: there are no such things. To avoid being apprehended, you need to work alone and tell no one of your caper. I can’t see that happening. Once you recruit others, you may just as well think about Bubba and Prober, whom you will be meeting in prison. If crimes were never solved in the past, today is a bit different. I need not remind you of Murphy’s Law and also the technology of the twenty-first century. These are just a few more stumbling blocks in the way of your retiring without going to work, at least to a job that doesn’t require a gun and the words, “Do what you’re told and no one will get hurt.”
6. You cheated; you lied

The words of the title of this chapter can be found in the 1958 song of the same name by The Shields. Unfortunately, people begin doing both to get ahead in grade school, and before long that habit is repeated in high school. All the pressures placed on students from their parents and society force them to continue this practice in college. My words earlier about the truth dealing with grades enter into the picture. The variety of educational grading systems implies a greater frequency of dishonesty. Using the system I discussed at the University at Binghamton – I hope it’s used there today throughout the different disciplines (a really good word in this discussion) – probably wouldn’t eliminate every instance of cheating, but it would curb some of the lies, and certainly be a step in the right direction.

There’s a saying that we learn too little too late and I don’t think any of us is exempt, but that’s life. In one of my books, I mentioned my wonderful class in ROTC. To summarize, I spent a great deal of time writing a paper on General Sherman – another of my heroes – for extra credit because I was in danger of failing. One class no one should ever have to repeat is ROTC, so I was taking no chances. The paper helped somewhat, as I did pass the course, but the grade I received was a D. I certainly deserved a C or better. All I can figure is that the “teacher” hated me, or the General, maybe both. This dude would probably pan my books too, even if he hadn’t read them.

From that fiasco, which I was overjoyed to see come to an end when I finished the last exam in my ROTC
adventures, I learned a great lesson. Grades in college aren’t really that important, just as long as you pass all your courses with sufficient grades. This compulsion to obtain all A’s – it certainly doesn’t occur with a pass / fail system – has a few side effects. First, it cuts into party time at school and we all need some of that. It leads to too much stress, health problems, and of course, cheating. When a corporation checks out an applicant’s resume, I doubt that they give two hoots about someone’s D in military science – I truly object to that last word there. Actually the only grades my prospective employers saw that mattered to them were probably from grad school where every one of my grades was a pass. Of course, to see even that would require them to gaze at a transcript, which I don’t think too many companies bother to do. As far as ROTC, I am proud to say I didn’t cheat in that course.

This way of getting ahead in school leads to more in the business world and in many other places in our society. I don’t think too many patients would be happy if the day before surgery, they found out that their doctor cheated in medical school. I certainly wouldn’t be too reassured. The same applies to airline pilots, and there are too many other applications that should move citizens to instill in their children the idea that cheating is not the way to handle the pressures of school. Some of these adults probably bypassed the rules themselves, while simultaneously pushing their offspring to attend Harvard or Yale. We all know of one graduate of the latter school whom some people voted for president and now wished they hadn’t.

I could write a book about corporate America, and
maybe that will be a subject for me down the road. For now I will just mention a few businesses that need tweaking in order to convince people that they really care about the customer and the employees, rather than the stockholders. I was a part of the workforce for about forty-five years, and about thirty-five of that involved full-time employment, some of it meaningful. You can read about some of my adventures in my two books on work as well as on the pages I have for my books on my web site. I should warn you that I’m not a big fan of big business because of the greed and the behavior of CEOs. I have also written of dumb things that people do – corporations and government are by no means exempt from this practice – in many of my books, with special coverage in the three books on missing intelligence. Consequently, I will limit this discussion to ethical practices, a form of cheating. Keep in mind that just because something is legal does not mean it’s the right thing to do.

I have to apologize if I left any corporation out. The economic mess that we faced as 2009 began is another great example of dishonesty on the part of people. Wall Street is a culprit of the highest order as are the financial institutions that allowed the mortgage crisis to erupt. Some names that you are familiar with are Citibank, Chase and BCCI, although the latter’s thievery occurred decades ago. I consulted at the first two banking institutions, as well as at other institutions involved with loans. Sadly, I know of a few friends of mine who were kicked out the door at CitiGroup Student Loan Corporation over the past few months. This practice of downsizing and outsourcing there by hiring cheap labor was a practice at that place years ago, and they aren’t
alone in doing this.

A few years ago, credit card companies looked out for the people. They actually served the consumer by reversing a charge by some store that was fraudulent. I described a charge that I disputed in another of my books. Chase reversed it and I provided plenty of documentation to show fraud, but then the credit card company changed sides and sided with the internet thief. I didn’t give up and after more effort than I should have been required to exert, I finally received a credit, wiping out the entire erroneous charge, including interest that should never have been levied in the first place. Unfortunately, the thief, Snidely Whiplash – not his real name – escaped with the money.

More recently, I was involved with another incident, which revolved around another credit card, a phone bill, the attorney general of my state, some culprit yet to be identified and an internet service provider (ISP). Since more than one individual is involved here, I think that qualifies as a conspiracy. It didn’t even have to do with my phone, but with my mom’s. However, her bill was paid with my former credit card, and the people at that institution didn’t help in the least. I gave them and the phone company information, but I think it only confused them.

The phone company heard about the unusually high billing one month – it continued for a few more months – and even provided a small credit, but failed to investigate. A representative of the company left a message on my phone saying the matter was turned over to the fraud department, but then a few hours later, someone from the company stated that there was no fraud. They really do waste no time
investigating. The truth was right there to be easily ascertained if only someone had put forth an effort. The ISP provided not a clue because no one contacted them. I had done enough research, so the phone company, the attorney general’s office and / or Visa should have done some investigating. I discovered that for a one-month period, my mom had over one hundred telephone calls on her phone bill. One was to a number that was dialed ninety-six times. The number called – on a few occasions two minutes after the previous call – was to an ISP. This made sense since a dropped line meant another call. My mom has no computer, so I haven’t figured how she dialed the service and with what she was using to communicate. She lived in a building with outside security as well as a lock to get into her apartment, so no one snuck into her home. If it looks like fraud, tastes like fraud, smells like it, and the evidence points to fraud, then it can’t be anything else. The phone pirate never admitted to the wrongdoing – why should he?

In the process, I wrote numerous letters, to no avail. I cancelled the credit card, changed both my phone provider and my mom’s and held back what I thought was overbilled. As far as this difference goes, I have no intention of paying it. Doing so would only make me a participant and supportive of fraud and deceit.

When the first few books of mine were published, I decided to add the Visa / Master Card / Discover option of payment for my web site. To do this I had to use a merchant account, which enabled charging through my web site. I found one and had the pay procedure working, but unfortunately there were very few book sales when I did this.
Each month, I was required to pay this company a set fee, which was not cheap. Moreover, with every sale, the company wanted a piece of the profits, even if only a small percentage. The *Seinfeld* episode involving double dipping is what was happening here. On the show, George is accused of that form of cheating by his girlfriend Betsy’s brother, Timmy, when he (Costanza) dipped the chip, put it into his mouth and then dipped the same chip again.

The merchant account is one example in the business world of this phenomenon. However, it happens with agents, book distributors, marketers and other thieves who want some of the spoils, even if they do very little to earn it. My agent didn’t double dip because she never helped me to have any book of mine published, even though she worked at it for years. I never worked with a distributor, but I met a successful Buffalo author who has been doing it for some time. Because of her involvement, she may be selling more books than by doing it herself, but she is still in the red. That’s because the distributor takes an up-front fee as well as a cut of the action. Well, in my book, you can’t have it both ways – it’s one or the other.

I’ve worked with marketers who may not have double dipped, but were just plain thieves. They charged a huge fee and sat back, expended a minimal amount of effort while I did most of the work. My latest encounter with double dipping occurred when I paid off my car loan to Toyota Financial Services (TFS) in February 2009. It was only then that I realized that I had been snookered. The process wasn’t as simple as making a payment to them once a month. Instead, a group called Smart Note – maybe for
them — got into the action. Every two weeks, $172.30 was debited my checking account by this company. They then sent a payment (one each month) to TFS, taking some of the money for themselves, which is understandable. No one works for free. However, there was a small delay, resulting in them having some of my money for a few days. I haven’t determined the extent of the time period, but it could well have been over a month. Multiply that small amount by the number of loans processed by a rate of interest that could be attained for stashing the cash temporarily, and a few dollars are involved. These are some of the methods of grabbing money from the people who have it, but they’re certainly not the only ones when it comes to double dipping.

At the end of January 2009, I viewed the movie, *Flow: For Love Of Water* at the Sierra Club meeting in Buffalo. I have to admit that another of my employers was featured in the flick, but it wasn’t praising the Nestlé Company. I was a full-time employee there for about four years, as well as a consultant after that for about three years. You may have heard about the baby formula incident so many years ago, but this time Nestlé was stealing water, bottling it and selling it in Michigan and reaping the profits. In early 2009, I saw a grocery ad for Nestlé Pure Lite water. I guess you can order a diet water — fewer calories than ordinary water. I mentioned that company in *I Don’t Want To Be A Pirate*, but I really wasn’t referring to Nestlé as pirates.

There are a few other corporations that I mentioned in my books that need to attend courses in ethical training. I may have discussed only a single publisher in my book about
the pirates in the publishing industry, but I pointed out a few other culprits, such as book stores – online as well as the real thing – agents and marketers, for starters. There were instances in my other books where companies disregarded the maxim that the customer is always right. They may even have considered that the shopper is never right, as greed was first and foremost, accomplished by cheating in many cases. I heard about two specific lawsuits brought up against Epson, and more recently, Google. I mention them because I had an Epson printer and had used Google. You may want to use Goodsearch in the latter’s place. From the one lawsuit in which I did participate, I garnered $45, and could buy a few groceries – very few.

The next not-so-nice corporation is WalMart, which brags about the lowest prices in town. They forget to add that the products for sale are of inferior quality and eventually – very soon and not even what is to be expected from planned obsolescence – will need to be replaced. This contradicts the fact that you’ll be saving any money by shopping there. The goods for sale are shipped long distances to arrive at each store – people can’t complain of a deficiency of lead in them, since many come from China. This is just another example of outsourcing that has not been beneficial to anyone except the CEOs.

Unfortunately, these facts are not the only reasons to not shop there. The corporation is taking steps in the right direction in some ways, but a few other things haven’t changed. First, they don’t pay the workers a decent wage while forcing them to stay on the job even after punching out. Health coverage is another issue that isn’t very
important to the corporation, but certainly needed by the employees. There have been cases of discrimination over the years, which have been settled, but it’s possible that they haven’t all been eliminated. The idea of a big-box store moving into a neighborhood means many small businesses will not even be small, which completely destroys a community.

I read the newspaper once a week on Sunday and listen to NPR rather than watch the news on television. Too often, I hear of another CEO being investigated, or a corporation biting the dust because of greed, thievery and cheating. Food is meant to be cooked, but that same process doesn’t apply to books, even culinary ones. You’ve heard of the fall of Enron, chronicled in the book, *Anatomy Of Greed: The Unshredded Truth From An Insider* by Brian Cruver. A few other disasters over the years have involved Exxon, Occidental Chemical, Dupont, Monsanto, Union Carbide and Dow Chemical, which I highlighted in my 2008 book on the planet. I mentioned Epson on the previous page, so why is it that a company whose name has five letters in it, starting with *E* and ending in *on*, seems to be incapable of decency? Sadly, there are others that I haven’t listed, and there are some that haven’t been revealed. One wonders if any large corporation acts in the interests of the planet and the people on it, rather that being obsessed with the bottom line, the shareholders and the CEOs.

The more I read, the more I see of the greed of corporations. The display of thievery by WorldCom, Adelphia, Tyco and others couldn’t have been done without another company, one of the accomplices being Arthur
Anderson. Even without the crooked accounting firms, so many of these disgusting instances involved a few people in the corporation, which is another name for collusion. Many more examples of this – including those by the businesses mentioned here – are revealed in the 2004 book, *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* by David Callahan, who covers not just corporate America, but the real reasons why dishonesty is practiced and almost necessary.

Anyone who wants to make a living will have to make sure to have a resume that will at least result in an interview. Don’t ask me what that is because too many factors enter into that consideration. Filling out that document could result in a bit of tweaking – another name for cheating. From my experience, the fudged resume might be a result of someone else’s efforts. Having been a software consultant, I can’t definitely say that I was a victim, but if so, I weathered the storm and lived up to the credentials presented. In another book, I mentioned an individual who wasn’t so lucky. He was to replace me, and I worked with him before he took over to ease his movement into the job. He was canned shortly after he began because the consulting firm doctored his credentials. I saw the fictitious resume, which indicated that he had more experience in what was necessary to survive in the assignment than I had before I started there in the spring of 1987. If so, why was I tutoring him?

This dishonesty by consulting firms is common, as is cheating on the job, whether by a manager or an employee just trying to get ahead. Sadly, if the deceiver had a head on
his shoulders, he wouldn’t have to be dishonest. Recently, I heard about someone who had been at a company for months, but wasn’t sure what his job was. That sounds like a *Seinfeld* episode. Actually, it was when George had an assignment, but didn’t know what it was. For all you fans of the show, I will spend an entire chapter later on relationships a la *Seinfeld*. As a software consultant, I went through the same challenge as Costanza, even before that episode. I’m sure I wasn’t the first.

I taught a computer course in Massachusetts in the early 1980s. Most in the class were diligent; however, one individual wanted a job that paid quite well but required little if any effort. This person is not unlike so many others in corporipoff America, and he or she can be making the minimum wage or less, or be receiving a seven-digit salary with stock options and bonuses. Any way you look at it, they are living a lie. On a positive note, I mentioned in my books that there are exemplary businesses that I have encountered – they do exist. I should add another that came to my attention in late 2008. *The Broadway Market* is just what its title says it is, a venue for food. It sells mostly meat, vegetables and baked goods, but you can pick up other things as well. Located not far from where I was born in Buffalo, the area has become rundown, but caring individuals are trying to bring it back to a semblance of what it was years ago.

In 2007 and 2008, I participated in *The Broadway Market Christmas Food Fair*, which takes place on the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving. In 2008, I sold one book on Friday, but had a fine time talking to the people. On Saturday I sold ten times as many books and covered the cost
of the table for the two days. Sometime that afternoon, the head honchos of the Market, led by Eddie and the others, told me that the day was such a success that they were tearing up my check for the table. They did the same to all the other vendors there that weekend. I really appreciated the gesture, and it showed that people really care for humanity. Others should follow their example, as that would save many people embarrassment and jail time.
The world of sports is another example of untruths by way of cheating. So many different people can be involved: officials of the game, coaches, players and even fans. You might question including that last individual in this category, but consider a single incident in baseball that has occurred in the past and probably will happen again. A supporter of the team – or maybe it was a person who could care less about who won the contest – stretched his baseball glove out over the playing field to snare the ball. This forced the umpire to call the batter either out or safe, his last decision resulting in a double or home run. Had the spectator not interfered, the final outcome of the game may have been different because of the ruling made by the official.

Fans have the right to any ball that winds up in the stands, but not to one in play. Thus, a fan cheated, and his action may have resulted in dishonesty on the part of the judge as to what should be the result. This one action might seem insignificant, but it could be the difference between winning or losing the game – it can be that crucial. The loss of one game could have playoff implications and may even result in a manager or coach being fired. A small effort on the part of a supposedly insignificant fan can have huge ramifications. It need not be limited to baseball, as fans on the sidelines of a basketball game can be so intimidating to an official – even threatening him or her – that the referee makes a bad call in favor of the home team. I need not tell you that European football, i.e. soccer, is a really tough sport, but it’s probably safer on the field than in the stands,
unless you’re wearing stripes. If you haven’t read *Among The Thugs*, it’s Bill Buford’s excellent book, in which he went undercover and joined the fanatics – shortened into the more familiar appellation, *fans*.

Players have been involved in the outcome of games on so many levels: throwing the game or just simply cheating. When a player traps a football and comes off as though it was a legal catch, that certainly isn’t honest or sportsmanlike. Instead of that approach, why not just go through the play until the whistle blows and then let the referee decide if the pass was complete? Screaming and complaining to the official doesn’t set a good example for our youth either. An athlete can also do things on the field that are illegal and may not be detected, or act like a kamikaze. You know those types who sacrifice their own bodies to smash and devour their opponents. The play may be legal – whether in hockey or football – but certainly not very nice. If a player is penalized, this could hurt the team, but he can also cheat his teammates, the owners and the fans by using illegal substances to enhance his prowess on the field, thus giving him an unfair advantage. In the book, *Game Of Shadows: Barry Bonds, BALCO, And The Steroids Scandal That Rocked Professional Sports*, Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams uncover this type of dishonesty in sports. Their investigation is reminiscent of work by Edward R. Murrow, and was so highly praised that it brought an invitation to the White House during George W. Bush’s time in office. Sadly, these journalists were on the verge of being incarcerated for their efforts.

An athlete of modest physique one day who a year
later looks like the Pillsbury Dough Boy indicates that something else is involved besides a good weight program. This does the superstar no good, as it can shorten his or her life and just isn’t playing fair. National Football League player Lyle Martin Alzado was a victim of heavy steroid use, dying at the age of forty-three of a brain tumor. Use of these enhancers is prevalent in sports and sends the wrong message to our youth. It also creates a huge problem as far as history goes.

If someone asks me who holds the record in baseball for the most home runs in a season, I might say, Babe Ruth or Roger Maris. The Babe hit 60 but was surpassed by Maris with 61. People will argue that the latter played in a season having more games, but you can counter that argument with the fact – I think it’s true – that many of Ruth’s home runs were actually ground rule doubles. Henry Aaron has the most career home runs with 755. I don’t think anyone will surpass that or question Aaron’s record of achievement, especially considering the pressure he went through during his baseball days. Another athlete who hit quite a few home runs was Josh Gibson, but he never made it to the major leagues. You will note that I didn’t mention the names of Bonds, McGwire or Sosa in this discussion. If you’re wondering why, you missed the entire point here. When the rules of sport change, it is difficult to keep honest records. It gets even more complicated when player-enhancing drugs enter the picture.

Sports players can also be dishonest when it comes to autographs and sports memorabilia. Someone who ignores a child when a baseball is to be signed or stays in the shadows
may not be doing anything illegal, but it certainly isn’t very considerate and it cheats the fans. If you are in the spotlight, you will have to put up with some inconveniences. Your paycheck brings with it great privilege, but also certain responsibilities. On the other hand, I would encourage our youth to look for heroes in occupations other than the world of sports. As for memorabilia, you may have heard of a superstar running back from Southern Cal who is serving time because of his behavior.

Coaches and managers are not absolved from the truth thing. Many people credit Coach Vince Lombardi with uttering the words, “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” Since he probably didn’t say it, I respect him as a coach, but certainly not the one responsible for those seven words quoted. That philosophy is a reason for doing anything to win. Recently a coach of a highly regarded team was accused of cheating and when I heard about this, I lost all respect for him. In that same season, the Super Bowl of 2008 ended with an undefeated team losing in the final game. Maybe that conclusion was fitting, but there have also been teams who went through an entire season (regular season plus the playoffs) without a loss. The last team that accomplished that was the Miami Dolphins in the early 1970s. I question the honesty of that record insofar as Coach Don Shula was on the committee of officials, which seems to be a conflict of interest. He probably didn’t pay off the officials, but because of his connection, his comments on the field during a heated contest may have swayed a call here and there. I have already mentioned the single play that can turn a game and season around. If you look at the scores of a
few of those seventeen games in that undefeated season, you will see a few that they could have gone either way.

Getting in the referee’s face could help your team, but it could also have the opposite effect, resulting in a game being lost. Of course, being nice to the official could change a loss into a victory. As a coach – which I was for a couple of years – I respected the men in stripes, and never questioned a judgment call. It doesn’t make any sense, and you gain nothing from it. I was quiet as can be on the sidelines. On one occasion I had a discussion with an umpire regarding the rules, and he changed his decision. In doing so, I hope I set an example for my players. In addition, as coach and official, we showed a great respect for each other, something that seems to be missing today on the court and in the stadium.

You may have heard about management engaging in questionable practices in order to win. There was one in which an owner watered down the field so as to slow down the other team in some way, thus insuring victory or at least giving the home team a slight advantage. This has been happening in various ways through the years in all sports and probably will continue to take place. Some owners allow trades that could hurt a team, rather than relying on the coaches to handle the draft and free agency. This could result in the fans being cheated, which in turn might hurt the owner with fewer people at the games.

Management can have an effect on those calling the game, but so can players and others, such as the league, which really is management. I abhor the use of instant replay for a few reasons. It simply doesn’t work and more or less
takes decision-making away from the officials. The players are human, so they make mistakes, but so do the referees. Why not leave it that way? Also, instant replay takes too much time – I thought there was a reference to *instant* in the name. On too many occasions, we see blown calls because of this feature, and a few games have been turned around because an initial judgment was not overruled.

When discussing the influence of the league, numerous seasons are filled with a few examples of the fans and the home team being ripped off. In 2008, when the Buffalo Bills lost a home game – and home field advantage – having to play the Dolphins in a neutral field in Toronto, it was only one of two such fiascos. The San Diego Chargers suffered an even worse fate when they had to travel overseas, as did their opponent. I’m not sure who won that game since I don’t follow the game that closely, but once again, a team lost home field advantage. The same scenario will take place in the future. The league can also mess up a team by scheduling three consecutive road games. The bye week could be applied to teams that play on a Sunday followed by a Thursday game. Naturally, this applies to the teams who play on Thanksgiving, but the league doesn’t always assign the bye week the way it should.

From my observations, when I still watched professional football, the league may have been fixing the outcomes of games. I was at Rich Stadium in Orchard Park on a winter day in January 1993 – and the fans were actually not experiencing frostbite – when the Bills pulled victory from the jaws of defeat by rallying to beat the Houston Oilers. The victors were down 35-3 early in the third quarter,
and slowly closed the gap until the gun sounded and they won the game, thus continuing on in their quest to reach the Super Bowl. People said it was the greatest comeback in the history of professional football, and it may well have been. I know it was some experience being in the stadium. When Coach Marv Levy was asked about the play of his quarterback, Frank Reich, he uttered something to the effect that Frank was brilliant in the closing stages, but people seem to forget that he was the leader on the field when his team fell so far behind. I enjoyed the afternoon, but wondered how a professional football team could lose such a big lead that late in the game? Is it possible that the game was rigged? Perhaps, it wasn’t, but fast forward to another playoff game between the Tennessee Titans – the team that replaced the Oilers by moving out of state – and the Bills. The game was played in the state of Tennessee and the team was new to its fans and the area. Is it possible that the final outcome was also fixed so that the new franchise and its followers were allowed to continue all the way to that final game of the season? Another reason for the team winning no matter what may have been payback for that playoff game between the same two teams a few years before that I just described. I viewed about a quarter of the latter game, but was still a fan and it appeared that the visiting team had no chance whatsoever of coming out a winner in that contest.

We know that different sports have had fudged outcomes, brought on by cheating people at many different levels, as I’ve mentioned. So much money is bet on football and basketball that observers of the game wonder about some of the final results. The favored team may win, but
when the point spread is not covered – Vegas is jubilant  
when the spread is exactly equal to the difference between  
the score of the two teams – one begins to wonder.  

In all matters of dishonesty in sports, the league itself  
may be complicit in this regard: maybe there’s nothing they  
can do about it. They may not even be aware of cheating.  
But they can mess up a bit with other decisions. By having  
so many pre-season games and charging full price for them  
as well as night games in the playoffs – which could be  
played in very cold stadiums in January – it isn’t fair to the  
fans. Charging such outrageous prices for going to a game in  
many sports, not just football, denies spectators the chance to  
attend and support their team. Players, coaches, management  
and the league all have a hand in being unfair to their  
supporters by the movement of players so much that one  
really needs to buy a scorecard, if he or she still has interest  
in the game. Many of these measures are nothing more than  
greed and inconsideration for the people without whose  
support there would be no competition.
8. Breaking up is hard to do

One of the funniest television shows of all time was *Seinfeld*, which viewers still have plenty of opportunities to see in repeats, many times a day. I was a huge fan, and from the title of this chapter, you probably figured out that it’s about relationships. *Seinfeld* purported to be a show about nothing, but it really was about people and their behavior. I have already mentioned a few instances dealing with the adventures of Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer. The interplay between them and the people they encountered deals with the subject of this book.

He may have been a character in more ways than one, but Kramer was the probably the one who was the most honest. When he reminded Audrey, George’s girlfriend at the time, that she was beautiful and that all she really needed was a nose job, we saw once again the need for restraint rather than sheer honesty, which can’t be emphasized enough. On another occasion when he was expected to tell Wendy that her hairstyle was out of fashion, he fooled us all by saying he really liked her look. This action only further confirmed the fact that he said what he thought.

On the other hand, on more than one episode, George indicated that he was living a lie – that is, his whole life was one. One incident had to do with the quartet’s “friend” Gary, who had cancer, of which George wasn’t aware. This was something that the other three kept from him. So in this respect, they weren’t being honest. Keeping things in the vault was another example of secrecy, which is necessary at times and certainly tied in to occasionally keeping your
mouth closed. It’s for the good of all. In so many instances George followed the pattern of so many people today by not worrying about whether his words or deeds had anything to do with the truth. Along the way, we were rewarded with much laughter and realized that we are no different from Costanza, Babu or the Soup Nazi.

You may have seen the episode where George breaks off his relationship with Patrice, the accountant who was supposed to help Jerry with his taxes, since he was being audited. George holds nothing back and as a result, Patrice heads out to a psychiatric home, and not to do their taxes. In the same episode, Elaine isn’t thrilled with the music and behavior of Kramer’s girlfriend Tina, who also happens to be sharing Elaine’s apartment. Ms. Benes is about to let the pair have her feelings known – with nothing held back, but somehow, she relents, and instead only states that the two of them make a nice couple. In this episode, George speaks the truth, although later he goes in the other direction, while Elaine was intending to be honest, but spreads it on thick.

In so many instances, our heroes were seeking relationships with people of the opposite sex, but by the time the program ended its tenure after eight seasons, no one in the group was married. George came the closest but Susan died because of the toxic envelopes that were to hold the wedding invitations. Even after that incident, Costanza was hardly moved and showed no emotion, almost as if to say he was relieved. Carry on.

Jerry, Elaine and George – Kramer needs not be considered because of his philosophy, which I will get into shortly – always found a reason for exiting the scene when
pressure was placed on them to move to the next level of the partnership. Each found the flimsiest of excuses why they couldn’t continue. Jerry decides to reunite with Melanie after temporarily abandoning her, only to cut it off when he can’t stand the way she eats her peas, one at a time. George and Elaine were no different as she broke up with Carl, the moving guy, because of Roe versus Wade. Even characters with a short life on the show experienced these same tendencies. At Monks, senior citizens Sid and Ben, with whom Jerry and George spent some time with – a very short time – were discussing the woman Ben met, who had known Gandhi. That friendship ended though, when Ben mentioned that she put milk in his tea, which was a turnoff. Nevertheless, Mrs. Oliver’s goiter didn’t bother the guy. Maybe he liked football.

Kramer’s object in life was to have a good time despite his lack of meaningful work, if any. As pointed out a few times in the show, his whole life was a fantasy camp. His relationships with women seemed to be short-term and numerous. They were also annoying to George, Elaine and Jerry, who in their own adventures were fearful of commitment.

Another type of friendship that Jerry was involved in was that with the same sex – not that there’s anything wrong with that. His relationship with Keith Hernandez raised the question of how fast a situation of that nature should proceed. Jerry wondered if it was acceptable to help Keith move when he had only just met him, and carried it a step further by asking Elaine if the shirt he was wearing was alright for being with Keith. Soon Elaine got together with
Keith and that set off some sparks and conflict between Jerry and Elaine, but it did generate some great laughs and inspired introspection.

I’m sure you’ve heard the words, “We have to do lunch” on numerous occasions. What the person uttering this sentence really means is she has to go and get away from the other person or worse, “Yeah, that’ll happen!” Jerry did go to lunch with a friend of a friend, who blows off an important business meeting just for lunch with an almost friend. This resulted in a firing and new career for Seth in the fast food business exemplified by Kenny Roger’s Chicken. Though Jerry questions this behavior and ponders the idea of the lunch in the first place, it’s not that far fetched as we all have moved on to a meaningful relationship through our friends. In fact, how do you think these relationships start in the first place?

The star of the show had a few other relationships with men that he wasn’t very enthusiastic about. One was with Ramon, the pool guy, who may have been out of Jerry’s league – he was in a lower class. He wanted to spend time with Jerry but this feeling wasn’t reciprocated. Another person felt that he and Jerry were the closest of friends but Jerry pointed out that he had never been to Joel’s apartment. When Seinfeld tried to end the deal, it brought tears to the victim’s eyes and Jerry relented, thus continuing the friendship, not what our hero really wanted. Jerry’s relationship with the doorman was another instance of our hero not wanting to even communicate with the guard on duty, and the building watchdog may have carried things too far in retaliation.
The 1998 witty and charming movie, *The Last Days Of Disco* chronicles the dating scene at clubs where you had to be admitted to enter the dance floor. The criteria for admission seemed to be that you had to be one of the beautiful people who weren’t in advertising, although others may have been snuck in. Kate Beckinsale and Chloe Sevigny played college roommates, Charlotte and Alice, respectively, who share an apartment while working in the publishing business by day before heading off to the disco at night. As expected, truth was hardly a consideration in hitching up with someone, but tact and restraint were never a consideration for Charlotte, who generally spoke what was on her mind.

The movie is centered in the early 1980s even though the disco thing began a few years before. While living a few miles from New York City in the mid 70s, I had an opportunity to be a part of that scene, even if for only an occasion or two. I remember very little of that time except that I wasn’t in advertising – which didn’t seem to matter – and the cover was ten or fifteen dollars for entering the club to hear music played on turntables managed by a DJ. There were quite a few songs that you could hear at the club that I liked. In fact I have a few on CDs I made over the years. The music was highly danceable, had a good beat and synthesizers were used to create much of the effect. As far as I’m concerned, these electronic devices produce a great sound, but when they are used to simulate every musical instrument, they scream of artificiality and lies. One device that can sound like a string section of an orchestra, a drum kit, saxophone or brass section means that good musicians
will be out of work. It also points to what music has become over the years.

Quite a while ago, I saw a one-man band at a bar in Clarence, New York, not far from where I live now. If I’m not mistaken, his name was Smoky Joe, and he did everything – within reason because he couldn’t play the harmonica and sing at the same time – without the use of a synthesizer. He was a true artist. His act was a bit of a stretch – I know musicians can master more than one instrument – but voice, guitar and harmonica for a single person are acceptable. Today, the really sincere performers are folk singers and blues people, who give us raw entertainment without the aid of synthesizers. On the Blues Brothers CD, Elwood, aka Dan Akroyd, tells the crowd about all the enhanced music when the blues is the real thing, without the embellishments found in that other crap.

A friend of mine mentioned the rock group, Toto and described their music as being overproduced. You could listen to it and not hear a note that was even slightly off. Perhaps the true artist is one who sings a bit flat or sharp on occasion or the writer who writes something that he realizes needs to be modified. Artists are only human, and that is to be expected. I understand that using what is available doesn’t subtract from one’s talent, but when a musical group relies too much on technology, they move away from being master craftsmen, as well as reality.

Another term that arises in dealing with the dating scene is game playing, the jousting, flirting and departure from the truth about who we are. When I was consulting in Norwalk, Connecticut, at Mercedes Benz Credit Corporation,
I met a fellow with the same first name. Bob mentioned his friend who had recently been married. Through the courtship, the two spent some time on camping trips – I doubt if these involved RVs. Shortly after the two were hitched, Bob’s friend was told in no uncertain terms that there’d be no more camping. I doubt that she approved of his further tent experiences, either with someone else or solo. This instance points out that untruth before the marriage could easily undo the partnership. Had I been in his shoes, I certainly wouldn’t have been a happy camper.

Unfortunately, this happens much too often and may be the reason why the divorce rate is so high. Truth gets in the way of success and it can also lead to trouble later on. Game playing is not limited to love relationships but it is a part of our everyday lives. On Seinfeld, we witnessed the gang’s involvements with the business world on so many occasions. The Soup Nazi wasn’t playing by the rules as he set up his own to benefit only one person – himself. Customers were forced to pay the price in order to have the prize, whether it was mulligatawny or bisque. Elaine didn’t put up with his antics though and the control freak was not heard from again until the final episode of Seinfeld. If you read my 2008 book on missing intelligence, wake up – it’s time for your sleeping pill. I suggested a spin off for the Soup Nazi, which you can find in chapter 12. You can also see it on the page I have for the book on my web site.

When Jerry was just being honest with Babu about his struggling restaurant, he intended no harm and made a great suggestion about converting to a Pakistani menu. In the process, our restaurateur failed miserably and Babu’s
friendship with Jerry also resulted in his being deported. Again, nothing deliberate was intended on the part of the star of the show. The business world is very cruel indeed.

Kramer meant no harm when he visited the mom and pop store that turned out to be a misnomer, as the couple had no children. Electrical violations and some other minor problems resulted in closing down the establishment. Later it was revealed that mom and pop were nothing more than schemers, not unlike many big corporations today. We also saw numerous other episodes of unscrupulous people in the commerce industry, such as the Kramer discount that George attempted to obtain when he bought a pair of glasses. From these many examples, we come to learn that we may be trusting of too many people.

As was discovered in the cancer episode, Gary eventually revealed to George that he never had cancer, which forces one to wonder about the whole idea of truth on the program. From my viewing Seinfeld, I felt that the four main characters represented all of us in some respect since just about every plot could come down to a viewer saying, “That happened to me or my friend.” The laughter was at times hysterical, but I really wouldn’t want any of these people for my friends. Probably the best way to describe them is despicable, but after all, this was merely a television show.

Seinfeld had a few other instances where the cast was about to hear that dreaded combination of words, “We’ve got to talk.” I guess that was more civil than hearing four other words beginning with a command heard at the dinner table and followed by, “And die.” Communication can have some
bad moments, as does life. On one episode, Elaine decided to offer her sympathies over the phone, which Jerry told her was a no-no. Later when she called someone on a cell phone, it was discovered that this means of talking also was not acceptable. Besides the laughs, *Seinfeld* provides a few lessons.
9. Kill the groundhog

I have nothing against the groundhog, but if he sees his shadow, we’re in for six more weeks of winter. Personally, I like cold weather, but not more than three months of that snowy season. I’m also not thrilled with shoveling the white stuff – especially two feet of it at a time – and ice storms. Well, there’s another problem here. Statistically speaking, the actions of the groundhog on February 2 have a reliability rating of about thirty percent. This indicates that not seeing his shadow might not translate into a mere two more weeks of cold weather. Seeing his shadow doesn’t mean a thing relative to six more weeks of winter.

Even with this switch, it’s better to just ignore any conclusion based on our furry February friend. After all, your groundhog is different from Punxsutawney Phil or Wichita Falls Warren, which is not really much of a concern because spring arrives later in some towns. What if any of these harbingers of the seasons oversleeps? Another consideration is the realization that the sun could be out where I live on Groundhog Day but it may be cloudy fifteen miles from here, which throws off the authenticity of these underground vegetarians. Don’t let any of these considerations bother you since the main problem has to do with statistics. If you care to obtain the truth, that may be one of the worst means of finding it.

Polls are one way of using statistics and might be a good indicator of the pulse of a city. Naturally, if the sample is too small, it may not be meaningful. A large enough
selection of people could still be troublesome if it’s not random enough. I really don’t care to submit to participating in surveys because of the questions. I may want to say something about an area of concern, but the ways the questions are asked don’t allow me to do that. This indicates that you can assemble a poll in order to show anything you want. This helps if you have a specific agenda. If a question is worded in a certain way, it could evoke a certain response, different from the one that would ensue with a slightly different wording of the question. Once manipulation is a part of the process, one wonders what the sense of the poll is anyway.

I mentioned being a member of the CCC, because of my health situation. Bellevue is a small area of the suburb of Cheektowaga, outside Buffalo, which has a few landfills, an asphalt producing facility and a stone quarry. The coalition is now defunct, but not because of a lack of effort on the part of a few individuals, namely, Donna Hosmer, Joe Gardella and John Stonefield. The neighborhood is noted for a great deal of cancer, autoimmune diseases, lupus, asthma and sickness of other kinds, as if those listed weren’t enough. While they could, the group and many community members fought to close down the quarry, even bringing a lawsuit against numerous conspiratorial – there’s that word again – businesses. A few studies were conducted and I talked briefly about Bellevue and the coalition in my previous books. At a follow up meeting at Resurrection Church on April 19, 2006, the organization that presided over dispensing the results of that effort assured the citizens there that the amount of cancer was about equal to a control area
of the same size.

To say that the people at the meeting who live in Bellevue, or had lived there, and were victims of corporate pollution were comforted by the conclusion put forth would be the furthest thing from the truth. My sister and I conducted our own survey, which may not have been scientific, but we talked to residents who mentioned all those who had died of cancer, were survivors, knew of those who suffered some kind of illness because of the proximity of these businesses, or themselves were experiencing some pain and suffering. The Department of Health didn’t seem to be looking out for our well-being and was just spreading untruths.

The department may have gone wrong in interpreting the results of the health study, and I really blame them for being so irresponsible. I even wrote a letter expressing my dismay, but it didn’t do any good. Their mistakes were numerous, including grinding out conclusions, administering the survey to the wrong sample of people and having a study that may have been a turnoff to many individuals. It’s one of the reasons why I don’t bother with those things – it was just too long. I was a part of the group that offered some suggestions for the survey, and a few of us were concerned about the number of pages in the study, which was probably why many people didn’t respond. Obviously you need to pry for answers, so it can’t be too brief, but the other extreme won’t suffice either. There are so many other issues, even if you have the appropriate number of pages. Victims of corporate pollution leave the area, so they may not be included, whereas new arrivals to the neighborhood won’t
have any impact on a study, and could unfairly neutralize the results. People who have died don’t get a chance to weigh in unless their relatives comment and people still living in an area may be too tired or sick to add their thoughts, even if they want to do so.

The study could have the wrong sample, which renders it useless. Some of the participants could have a vendetta against a corporation, especially if they were wrongfully terminated. Other people answering questions could be sick but refuse to speak out because their employer is the business being sued. The study could be too limited by only canvassing people with cancer. Some cancers in the area could have been caused by other corporations, such as the cigarette companies, and thus the quarry, landfills and asphalt plant may be falsely accused. One of the main problems in suing a corporation for wrongdoing is that proving a definite cause is nearly impossible. I can say with ninety-nine percent certainty that most cancer is caused by environmental pollution, but proving that in a courtroom is another story.

Polls are one type of study, sometimes related to health. Another is the presidential election exit poll, which asks few questions that no one would probably avoid. Over the last few years, these polls in the United States have been extremely reliable in determining the winner before all the votes are counted. This isn’t necessarily true in banana republics, even those close to the North or South Poles. Just before the voting ended in the 2004 election between George W. Bush and John Kerry, exit polls clearly indicated that Kerry was the winner. Anyone who woke up on the
following morning, who wasn’t aware of the outcome, soon discovered that the challenger who ran to send Bush back to Crawford had lost. We certainly can’t rule out the voter who votes one way and reports voting for the other person. However, the exit polls in this outcome may have indicated some finagling by higher ups to ensure four more years. Maybe we just wouldn’t have to depend on Costa Rica for our supply of bananas.

Whether you’re concerned with surveys, studies or polls, they all come down to the same scenario. Each is intended to uncover some facts or truths. Simultaneously, they all have a great opportunity for distortion and this is related to statistics. It’s a known fact that flying is much safer than driving. This is based on the number of fatalities and injuries recorded by covering millions of miles. Tell that to those who suffered a loss in the plane crash not far from my home on Thursday, February 12, 2009 of Continental flight 3407. Fifty people perished – one on the ground and the rest on board the plane. The house that was hit was completely demolished, but miraculously, two people in it survived. Among those who died was 64-year old Gerry Niewood, a saxophonist extraordinaire, who was flying from his home in New Jersey for a concert in Buffalo with Chuck Mangione. I had the pleasure of seeing him in concert twice, once in Rochester and then later in Buffalo at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. The music world mourned his passing, and Western New York at the time was in a state of depression and sadness because of the tragedy that struck that evening.

I heard the news shortly after it happened as I was
channel surfing and stayed with the three news stations in Buffalo. They all did an outstanding job in coverage, but I noticed a few inaccuracies in what was said. Since there was and will always be competition for market share, this is not unusual. Obtaining the truth in good times is not that easy, so one has to expect it to be that much more difficult in times of crisis. One reporter did mention that the crime scene was closed off. I would prefer the use of the word, accident, since the word spoken was a bit premature without all the facts. However, on reading about the investigation, it appears that the disaster could have been avoided because of the weather, and that no doubt is a crime.

You are probably aware that statistics can imply any conclusion desired by the person conducting the survey. As I mentioned, this can be achieved by the wording of the questions. One may almost conclude that polls or surveys are worthless, since they prove nothing. In my fourth book, I talked about a host of studies by the government – I don’t think we can excuse the business world here, either – of wasted resources. This book was all about missing intelligence and so many studies fill the bill here, even ones not discussed in that 2005 book. People laughed at this chapter of government decisions but I need not remind them that it was their tax money that was wasted. On too many occasions I hear of research that produces a conclusion that I or someone else could have arrived at without spending copious sums of money. The more you consider it, the more you can easily be convinced that too many studies are unnecessary.

I mentioned a few of my pet peeves about surveys,
including their length and the fact that there were certain ideas that I wanted to offer, but the way the questions were worded didn’t give me the opportunity. Many people probably feel the same way, but remember who created the survey and what he wanted out of it. When the Environmental Protection Agency puts out a study, you might feel that they have concern for the planet, and when the Department of Health surveys the people of a community, you would think that they are doing it to protect the well-being of the citizens. As history has shown, that is not always the case.

Majoring in mathematics in college, I was blessed with attending courses in statistics. I did all right in those courses and even used the topic in the second book I had published, my novel about the national lottery. I may never write another work of fiction, but in that novel, deception played a major role, along with statistics and lotteries, which are intricately tied together. Anyone who reads the book will probably buy fewer lotto tickets if he is a junkie. Perhaps that will be a good thing even if it doesn’t completely turn him off from buying those tickets for a dream that won’t happen. In writing the book, I altered my feelings about that game of chance, but only slightly. Unfortunately, people still spend too much money on lotteries despite the fact that the odds are astronomical against them. They may know this, but they still practice the same behavior. They just can’t believe despite the facts.

This brings up another observation that I’m sure you have witnessed. Suppose you are talking with someone and you relate a true incident – it may be almost unbelievable,
but it happened – and the listener refuses to believe it. However, on another occasion, this same person takes to heart something that you tell him that is a complete fabrication. Somehow they accept the lies, but not the truth. So what do you do with this individual? Do you just skip relating events that are real and offer nothing but untruths to him?

Another closely related topic to this chapter has to do with research, which is done to establish facts. This is the approach used by many organizations to check whether a product will work or at least bring in some revenue. Notice that the two are not mutually exclusive. Since this involves much consideration, it will be relegated to another chapter.
10. Health care, vitamins and drugs

This is the chapter I wrote last, since it’s the result of the blending of a chapter on health and another on vitamins and drugs. It’s difficult to separate the two topics, so I combined them and did quite a few revisions. The first consideration is a truth about doctors: they’ve come a long way over the decades. Fifty years ago, the way they treated patients involved a great deal of condescension, even if unintentional. Perhaps this had to do with a feeling of superiority – indeed, they had more schooling in areas of health and healing – which is understandable. Of course, not many people were happy with that approach. The doctors may have performed surgery, but hardly said a word to the men, women or children they operated on. Not a lot was said to family members, either. When it came to grave matters, that situation was another matter that no one cared to face. This reluctance to talk leads to a few problems related to the idea of truth. This could have been the reason why physicians didn’t always tell a sick person all she knew. It’s not easy to tell someone that they have cancer, but it becomes more of a challenge when the prognosis is not good. I’ve always been consoled by the fact that as bad as it might seem, the judgment could be a bit off, so one can always have hope.

In the twenty-first century, some of this behavior has remained, including the bad news revelation. That probably will never change. On the other hand, doctors are more respectful of patients, and there’s much more communication. There is conclusive proof that things have
improved dramatically over the years since those three words, “You’ve got cancer” were words of doom, not that long ago. Today, they’re only slightly more discouraging than calling a business and on entering their voice mail system, hearing the words, “I don’t understand you” by a electronic automaton. At present, consumers are smarter and realize that they themselves must take care of their health. This may be one of the reasons for improvement in communication.

Because of my health challenges over the last decade, I have come directly in contact with about eight doctors. About half of them are diligent and really care for the person in the waiting room. Each does not look down on the individual under his care, which I can’t say about of few of the others. There is still one practice that people would like to see replaced, which has to do with the number of patients a physician sees. With all the paperwork, the health care industry requires tasks that a doctor shouldn’t have to handle, not to mention fear of litigation. I’ll deal with drugs later in more detail, but matters don’t improve when a patient is obligated to buy some product because of a financial benefit that a physician will see, since the latter has an interest in some pharmaceutical firm.

Another very sad truth that we see is that an HMO will cover a treatment for an illness but may not offer a penny for preventive care. This makes as much sense as spending millions of dollars for an incarceration facility while hundreds of dollars would have been more wisely spent on education. Our health care system is in desperate need of remediation. In one of my books, I renamed it the
health-could-care-less system.

On occasion, doctors return to the past in their behavior. In early 2004, I noticed blood in my stool, so I made a few calls and eventually visited my family doctor. Well aware of my problem, since his office was the object of my phone call, he proceeded to place one of his appendages in a part of my body where the sun doesn’t shine. I was then advised that there was blood in my stool. Didn’t I mention that on the phone not that long before this invasion of my privacy? There was another time a few years later, when I went to see someone in the health care profession about removal of a wart on my finger. I was told that I had an advanced digital something or other (ADSOO) – i. e., you guessed it, a wart – and I left the office, but my ADSOO is still visible today. One thing that was removed was money from my wallet for a co-payment. In both cases, I wonder why I even bothered with these two visits.

I have a great deal of respect for the health profession, but they don’t always have all the answers, despite years of schooling. In early 2009, I was struck by two minor health problems. Each winter, my hands redden and I experience swelling, along with something very annoying, cracked skin. That year was no different but there was an added bonus when I contracted a staph infection. I probably picked it up when I was visiting my mom in the Erie County Medical Center. The solution – it cleared up both problems – was a prescription of sulfa drugs, or antibiotics. Not long after that, the part of my body on my face that detects fragrances appeared to be not unlike that one on the face of W. C. Fields. Since I don’t imbibe hard liquor – beer or wine
is an occasional indulgence of mine – I ruled out that possibility. I didn’t recall walking into a wall or being in a bar fight – that itself could have been two reasons for my proboscis problem – so those causes were eliminated. I don’t think I sleepwalk, but if I did and stumbled into a doorframe, I think I would have woken from my slumber. My nose was red and tender, so I thought about contacting my family doctor, or else my dermatologist. However, I stalled for time and the next day I noticed that the schnoz was better. A few more days and the redness and tenderness were both gone. I never did surmise what caused the nose deal, and a doctor may not have diagnosed it either. Who nose?

In 1989, I experienced some stomach discomfort, so I saw a doctor who was recommended by a friend. Some tests were done but no diagnosis came out of the process. I figured I’d survive and I did, until the same feeling hit me in early 1998. Once more I had an upper or lower GI Series – I never was in the Army so I’m not sure which one it was – but once more the doctors just didn’t know. I figured it might be an allergy, but when I tried testing that theory, it appeared that I was allergic to any food I ate. I let it go and figured I could live with the occasional discomfort.

After the Labor Day weekend of that year, things got much worse. My sister Pat drove me to the emergency room of Sisters Hospital in Buffalo and it turned out that I had a blockage and colon cancer. Perhaps the profession should have required a colonoscopy in early 1998 because of my symptoms, as well as the fact that I had passed my fiftieth birthday. In 1989, I was forty-seven, so that may have been a good idea at that time as well. Of course, maybe in the late
1980s, that procedure wasn’t prescribed the way it is today. Since I’m writing this over ten years after my first surgery, you are aware of the fact that I’m a survivor. These episodes, spanning over a decade, seem to indicate that there are issues that medicine can’t detect, diagnose and cure at the first sign of a problem.

I’m not sure which is worse: no diagnosis for some problem or a misdiagnosis. Consider Alzheimer’s disease. A nursing home may have a unit for it with twenty patients. Many people are not clear what constitutes the sickness. Moreover, it can’t truly be diagnosed except with an autopsy. Since most people consider that detection mechanism an imposition, isn’t there a contradiction here? The connection between senility, dementia, short-term memory loss and Alzheimer’s is quite obvious and maybe there’s a fine line separating these problems, but to only further confuse the issue, mad cow disease has been misdiagnosed as Alzheimer’s. It’s no wonder that there are so many wrong decisions made as to what malady patients are suffering.

As bad as the wrong blame is concerned, there have been even more troublesome situations. I’m sure you’ve heard of a surgeon amputating the wrong leg of a patient or removing the appendix from the sick person in bed A rather than bed B. Is it possible that there have been other cases of this same practice that haven’t been reported?

We have to be concerned and do our part since being in a hospital is fraught with results that no one wants. Being there – especially as a patient – presents a not too pleasant scenario since there is always the danger of an infection setting in. Since doctors and hospitals are meant to effect
change for the better, the thought of that possibility of germs and bacteria might escape the thought process of the patient. The health care profession has a possible cure for that dilemma as they treat you and send you home, as soon as possible. When I had my own hospital bed for about a week at Sisters Hospital in Buffalo in the spring of 2004, I was comforted by the fact that I was in good hands and this had nothing to do with my car insurance. When a person is released too soon, it provokes mixed feelings, although it’s probably for the better. Doctors know a great deal, so when my surgeon said I could go home, my sister Pat was apprehensive – and so was I. However, the doctor was right because I avoided any possible infection by leaving when I did.

All Doctors and nurses treat sick people, but the methods they use are different. The former – because of waiting room mentality – spend very little time with those in need of care, while nurses have a different attitude about someone in a hospital bed. Maybe this is a result of the variation of the training of each, which is long, but each involves different approaches to what the people in health care will be administering. In my journey, I communicate with doctors and nurses, but in general, with nurses it’s more meaningful, relaxed and progressive.

Perhaps times have changed, but today those with a degree in medicine have two approaches that they use, which could be described as cut and run. Anyone undergoing surgery experiences the first on the part of the doctor, while a patient who is handed a prescription is on the run to the pharmacist for relief. When it comes to the invasive
procedure, you hear someone casually mentioning that she will be having surgery, and the attitude of the speaker indicates that the whole procedure is no big deal. Having been there, I wholeheartedly disagree with that feeling, as there is no such thing as minor surgery. When it comes to invasive procedures of any kind, I consider the quest for my blood in that category. In fact, any situation where the skin is broken or an instrument is inside my body – I think that covers it all – is invasive.

Surgery may be the only way – because of late detection – so I can’t argue with that choice, but in many cases it’s probably not necessary and could result in horrible results, as I mentioned earlier with the wrong patient missing a part of his body that was fine. Too often, the health care profession forgets about prevention and only offers solutions to cancer and other sicknesses by prescribing drugs and operating. In many cases, even routine testing may be ineffective and could even create other problems.

I mentioned my mysterious tender nose, but this failure to diagnose – no pun intended – occurs quite frequently. At the same time great strides have been made in the world of medicine. On Thanksgiving weekend in 2008 at the Broadway Market, I met a man who had experienced prostate surgery only a month before I saw him. He seemed content and happy and mentioned that he had a full meal at the hospital shortly after the operation and went home the next day. When I had a similar surgery in 2004, I was still recuperating three months afterwards. In his case, he was the beneficiary of a less invasive procedure using robotics.

At the time of my diagnosis of prostate cancer, there
were a few options – even more than the normal cut or ingesting drugs. One surgical procedure involved removal of the organ while another idea was radiation treatments. A third choice is the implantation of seeds in the prostate, which didn’t sound like I’d soon have vegetables produced from within my body. Actually, it appeared to be much worse as the seeds would be radioactive. In all cases, if I have to choose between the knife and the bottle for curing, I really would like another choice. In the case of prostate cancer, there was a final possibility of watchful waiting, but that wouldn’t be too profitable for the health care profession. The last option sounded good to me and probably could have involved alternative healing methods, but I doubt that any other doctor or oncologist would have felt that was the way to proceed, for me or for anyone else. Robotics were beginning to come on the scene.

When it comes to drugs, the problem may be worse. The first difficulty is in the testing of the drugs. There’s a great dilemma that arises when bringing a new one to the market. If too much time is spent on that procedure, it results in fewer profits for the pharmaceutical companies and people who may be cured by this innovation go lacking, resulting in suffering or even worse. Rushing that pill out only to find that it’s ineffective will be of benefit to no one. If it has debilitating effects, it may even result in huge lawsuits, which could bankrupt a company. In some cases that outcome could be a good thing. Still, we shouldn’t ignore the benefits of some drugs, without which people wouldn’t be alive.

One truth is that senior citizens have a host of drugs
that they swallow, some with each meal, some once a day and others not so frequently. This combination can be lethal, and because of the different doctors per patient, one may not know what the other is doing. Perhaps the pharmacist can come to the rescue, but don’t count on it. And yet, with technology today, why is this such a problem? In many cases, the lowering of the dosage or even being completely free of the drug can result in improved health for the patient. This is not very surprising.

We can’t ignore the possibility that some drug won’t work or may even be harmful and make matters worse. Before proceeding, I think we need to consider some of the myths about drugs. The first is that one little pill will solve all of our health problems. The second thought is that if it’s over the counter, we need not consult a pharmacist or a doctor. The next belief is that what a doctor prescribes is exactly what the patient needs. Finally, it’s an accepted fact that side effects are to be expected. In each of these statements, some truth does come about, such as the knowledge that a drug does offer an alternative to pain. While visiting a hospital unexpectedly in 1998, on awaking in my hospital bed, I experienced the feeling that I had just been run over by a truck, even if it was only a Datsun pickup. I look back a decade later and think that maybe I should have avoided the painkillers, but that’s not your feeling just after surgery. The Darvoset and Demerol helped, but I recall one side effect that I experienced after I came home that wasn’t too pleasant. It was the worse case of constipation I have ever gone through. However, the side of the bottle of the painkiller stated exactly that possibility.
When it comes to choosing between the pain and the side effect, that’s certainly not an easy decision. I doubt that too many side effects of drugs are desired. To make matters worse, a side effect may not appear for years. On the bright side, a drug could alleviate a particular problem – for which it was prescribed – and simultaneously and miraculously heal some other malady.

The situation is worse when a drug is to be taken off the market and yet somehow remains on the shelves until the last package is sold. Why would any manufacturer want this to happen? Apparently the answer has to do with profits. This is irresponsible behavior on the part of the pharmaceutical companies, indicating their concern for the bottom line, rather than for the consumer. It also indicates missing intelligence since that one pill that should be nowhere in sight may result in a huge lawsuit that could forever close down the corporation. This pain should never have been fostered on the patient, no matter when the drug was used.

The drug alternative may be the only way in certain instances, but not the way society utilizes them – as a way of life. As far as I am concerned, illegal drugs have a place for alleviating pain, but that’s only in a few cases. For any kind of drug, there are too many side effects. One specific drug causes other problems that require even more drugs, with their own set of bad results. What we have is a society of senior citizens hooked on drugs, rather than phonics. My dad died shortly after his eighty-seventh birthday, but the last four years of his life were in pain and suffering. It seemed like his visits to the hospital at that time should have come
with a free shuttle service and his body weighed less than a hundred pounds when he left us. This was the result of drugs, which prolonged his life, but at a huge cost. Too many drugs render a patient unable to taste food or even to have a normal appetite. That was the main reason why he couldn’t keep up his weight – he wouldn’t eat much, because he didn’t want to.

Other facts that all can agree upon is that drugs are addictive and can change people’s lives. Daphne du Maurier has written a gripping novel on both these issues. In *The House On The Strand*, our hero Richard experiments with a few drugs that his friend Magnus feels might lead to some great scientific discoveries. It doesn’t take long before Dick travels back in time to fourteenth century Cornwall and he is addicted. He has a difficult time overcoming these desires to continue on his adventure with the past and his life is changed forever. Ms. du Maurier has painted a horrid picture of the downward descent into a world that too many experience and can’t be freed from. Each of us has seen friends or family members succumb to alcohol or drugs, illegal or prescribed. We may have felt saddened because we thought we hadn’t done enough in the matter, but our input probably wouldn’t have made a difference. Our society compounds the difficulty by offering assistance only if the troubled person checks into a facility on his own, something he is not capable of doing.

Most drugs are made known to the public by means of advertising. It doesn’t matter how effective the pill is – all the producer cares about is cash flow. Television sells huge quantities of drugs, such as prescriptions for alleviating some
kind of problem – in some cases, even before it arises. Drugs are overpriced in order to benefit the pharmaceutical companies. Consumers don’t complain if they wind up paying five dollars for a prescription and the HMO chips in the rest, which could be hundreds of dollars. Perhaps someday the United States will have a single payer system. This possibility will mean so much to so many people, if only corporations would embrace it and the PACs butt out. Each of these leeches would still wind up with plenty of cash in their pockets. It just wouldn’t be as much as they are siphoning off now. This new health program will also be welcome by struggling companies, especially small businesses – the good ones. They’ll be able to survive. Amazingly, it would cost less than the mess we have today.

In the spring just before Jay Leno left prime time television, one of his last guests was the NBC news anchor, Brian Williams. I’ve always had a great deal of respect for Brian, and that evening, he showed another talent as a humorist. Brian went on to comment on a commercial for Flomax, which was hysterical. I won’t go into the details but I wish I had thought of this commentary. The reason why I didn’t is due to the fact that I don’t watch much television, let alone those awful commercials. Nevertheless, in my eyes, Brian’s thoughts pointed out that the marriage of the drug companies with the corporate world of entertainment was a union that looked quite shaky and doomed for failure.

Despite all this bad news, other branches of medicine that are ignored by many health care professionals deal with alternative ideas for good health. Exercise and avoiding fast-food restaurants may seem extreme to some
people, but they really make good sense. Vitamin supplements and the use of herbs is not an idea to be ignored. After all, drugs are produced from herbs, so if one lambastes the use of the latter, doesn’t that very thought say the same about drugs? People accept drugs but too often come up with some excuse for not accepting the use of herbs. Recently I was emailed a reply to a comment that I sent concerning just such common alternatives. The sender may have been more supportive of drugs than herbs, saying that a particular combination of herbs had been tested for a specific malady and showed no beneficial effects. Information I found indicated that the combination of herbs I was mentioning not only had great potential for healing, but they had some miraculous potential for curing cancer.

Essiac is credited to the Canadian Nurse René Caisse, who lived in the early twentieth century. Her name spelled backwards is essiac, for those of you who aren’t dyslexic. In the 1930s, doctors entrusted to her care a few cancer patients that they had given up on. One – maybe two – of these died, but all the rest survived to a ripe old age because René gave them essiac, which is a combination of four herbs: sheep sorrel, burdock root, slippery elm interrbark and rhubarb root. You can read about this in Calling Of An Angel by Dr. Gary Glum of Los Angeles, which I haven’t read. I did read another book about essiac, given me by my ex-sister-in-law, via my brother. I returned the copy but purchased another. At present, it’s not in my home, so I don’t have the title. If you have something that you really want to get rid of, giving it to the right person – one who loses it or never intends to give it back – will be your way of recycling, and that’s the truth.
On Thursday, February 3, 2005 I attended a meeting of a support group for prostate cancer. At that time I met a few gentlemen who used essiac and they all touted its benefits. Russ, a man in his seventies, had some time ago been diagnosed as a *terminal* prostate cancer patient. I think that first adjective has something to do with the airport. He was treated for cancer and afterwards had been taking the combination of the four herbs, and has been free of the malady for years. He had a cane, but looked fine and was convinced of the benefits of Caisse’s formula. He also related the story of a Jehovah’s Witness who was diagnosed with cancer in East Aurora. Since their beliefs don’t allow surgery to save a life, she was told she only had a few months to live. She took the herbs and has been cancer-free ever since. I should add that some of Russ’s friends also commented that he increments his intake of the herbs with a shot of alcohol, so maybe it’s the whiskey that is working. Nonetheless, if the combination works, why not go with it?

When I heard about this alternative to drugs and the stories, I was impressed and I bought some of the product, which you can obtain in health foods store as a tea, already brewed. The gentlemen at the support group told me that it was better to brew your own, which is not that difficult. You buy the pre-measured herbs and can do a gallon at a time with what’s in the packet. I split it into four parts and only make a quart at a time. Each evening before retiring to bed, I drink an ounce of essiac with an equal amount of hot water, so one batch lasts about a month. Besides what I have pointed out, Russ also mentioned that since he began using the herbs, he has not had a cold in years, which I consider
remarkable. That alone may be reason to drink the brew, but my source of information also lists a few other maladies that essiac can cure, or at least minimize symptoms. Much of what I have written in these previous paragraphs is also available at the link, “cancer cure” on my web site, bobcooks.com.

Drugs are touted for their healing properties, but I mentioned that they are produced from herbs. You may ask why the herb would be effective while the drug made from that same herb has to be recalled as toxic and dangerous to anyone’s health. Perhaps the reason is because of what is added to create that pill. Nicotine may not be good for you, but now add a few ingredients to make it addictive and it’s much more dangerous, even when doctors praise it and smoke themselves. In the case of the herb as well as the drug, testing needs to be done to assure the public that what they are about to ingest is safe. This is not an easy thing to do and it takes time, as I pointed out.

We are also aware of the placebo effect. This indicates that perhaps an herb or a drug works because of the expectations of the person who swallows it. We can’t rule that out, except that when we witness so much success, we must acknowledge the benefits of the drug or herb. The same can apply to vitamins, which we know are effective, even if not all of them. When sailors at sea were deprived of fresh fruits and vegetables for extended periods of time, the result was scurvy. Eating citrus fruit, a source of vitamin C, or specifically, ascorbic acid, cured it. We need a certain amount of vitamin C in our diet, but doubling the dosage may not provide any additional benefit except put more cash
in pockets of the companies that sell the vitamin. We also know of the necessity of one vitamin to enable absorption by another as well as the fact that a single dosage of one vitamin might completely negate the effectiveness of another one. Numerous studies have shown that vitamin supplements enable us to have better health, although it’s more beneficial to obtain the vitamins directly from fresh fruits and vegetables.

I thought about writing another novel about deception and conspiracy, not unlike my first one. I had two possible subject areas. The first was a vitamin consideration, where it was discovered that all those vitamins that we purchase are nothing more than placebos. They seem to work, but then, isn’t that the way sugar pills affect some of those who use them? The second idea for a novel is about cancer. I mentioned the cancer conspiracy described in the book by Dr. Devra Davis, and my novel would deal with cancer as a creation of the health profession. We know of many illnesses that doctors treat – some successfully and others not so well. It may have to do with the different stages of the malady. It could come to pass that many of these situations fall under an umbrella of disease called cancer. Since there are so many people felled by sickness, in which no diagnosis is rendered, this idea for a novel may not be that farfetched.

Doctors know a great deal – they spend a great deal of time and money studying – but it surprises me when I mention certain non-drug cures, of which they are not aware. When a physician refuses to accept the use of a witch doctor – smile, but is this not so far fetched – I wonder if he isn’t being protective of his profession. I also believe in the power
of prayer, a positive outlook, hope and laughter as cures for what ails us, even cancer. Aren’t these possibilities – which witch doctors practice – just what alternative medicine uses? You’re not laughing now.

Another aspect of health is what we eat. Some people stay away from meat and meat products – vegetarians and vegans. The real distinctions between the two classifications are slight, except that vegans have more restrictions and they can basically only eat fruits and vegetables. I’m not sure if they are allowed to eat produce that has been fertilized with meat by-product waste. In a way I applaud these people but somehow I’m not one who will make vegetarian dishes that we know as Hungarian goulash and sauerbraten. After all, these dishes need to have meat. When I was growing up, my mother cooked meat six days a week – Friday was fish for us Catholics. Even today, she still abstains from meat on Friday, despite the dispensation. When she cooked for our family, we also ate meat for lunch in the form of sandwiches, including baloney, summer sausage, ham, turkey – but not liver sausage for me – and of course, tuna fish and egg salad, which are the non-meat offerings. I also was forced to eat cold fried egg sandwiches, so apparently my mom believed in variety, even if her son didn’t care for it.

Today, I eat very few things with meat, but I’m not a vegetarian, nor could my cooking be classified as such. However, I prepare a host of recipes without meat – there is a difference. Check my web site for all those recipes. There are some really good ones there. Not that long ago I tried a dish with tofurkey sausage and wish I hadn’t wasted the money. It was truly disappointing and this meat substitute
had no taste and almost no texture. I will never indulge in a toforkey Thanksgiving dinner. I subscribed to Vegetarian Times for a few months but I object to their substitution of non-meat products to simulate certain types of meat. You can cook some great dishes and you don’t need meat. In my cookbook, I described a fantastic pasta dish I had in Wales in the summer of 1983 that was nothing more than fresh tomatoes, olive oil, garlic and herbs – I surmise. Leaving out the meat is also healthier. I read a Buffalo News article on Sunday April 5, 2009 that advocated avoiding red meats and processed meat, such as cold cuts and sausages, as well as pork for different reasons. There is no need to forever stay away from these meats, but rather to use moderation and substitute fish and eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.

In the fall of 2003, I sold my house in East Aurora and moved into a condominium. I had lived in the house for over eleven years, at which time I grew my own vegetables and some fruit. Everything was organic, but not in the sense of what you hear about in the news and at the supermarket. My garden simply used no fertilizers – except for processed cow manure – and no chemicals. I did place a tablespoon of Epsom salts at the bottom of the hole and covered it with dirt before adding a small tomato plant. I’m not sure if that addition was a chemical, but I heard it increased the yield of the plant. I used mulch that I created myself from the peels and waste of fruits and vegetables as well as grass clippings, which also were chemical-free since my lawn was never treated that way. That in essence is what organic truly means.

I don’t shop at the supermarket for organics because
they’re high priced and probably not truly organic. A farm that grows crops the way I did but then applies a fertilizer made from the waste of a huge meat facility in North Carolina can’t be classified as an organic farm. It’s similar to the writing on a box of cereal that advertises low sugar, but fails to add that the sodium content is high, or a product that is low-fat but high in cholesterol, which is not mentioned on the package. Truth in advertising is a huge dilemma, but the concept does sell the product.

Fruits, vegetables and meat all provide nutrients and necessary health for consumers. Liver and spinach are both rich in iron, which we need in our diet, but I’m not fond of either – in fact I avoid liver at all costs. I have started to eat spinach – it’s just a matter of how it’s prepared. Thankfully, we can obtain iron and other necessary vitamins from many sources, so we are not limited.

Along with all the means we have of recovery – drugs, surgery, herbs, vitamin supplements and the rest – we have a few more tools at our disposal. Besides hope, we can also take advantage of a good outlook, prayer and one of my favorites, a good sense of humor. I truly believe that laughter is the best medicine and it’s available even without a referral. You need not have health insurance – something that too many people today in the United States don’t have. By the time you read this, I hope that this fact changes.

In the summer of 2008, I posted on my web site a great example of what laughter can do. I met a woman at a book signing in the fall of 2005 who bought my cookbook. Karima is a retired schoolteacher who works as a storyteller in different capacities, including visiting prisons. Soon after
that autumn day of a few years ago, she sent me an email expressing her love of the book. In 2008, I asked her to write a review of the book on amazon.com, which she agreed to do. For her effort, I sent her a copy of the second book in the series on laughter, language and lunacy. She didn’t read it right away because her father was sick and she and her sisters were tending to his needs.

Karima’s dad was about to turn 92 in a few months, when he was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of laryngeal/pharyngeal cancer. Until that time, he was very active, playing golf, still driving his car, working around the yard and singing in the choir. All that suddenly changed and he was bedridden, relying on a walker to get around, which was difficult for him. One day, Karima had a chance to open the book and she laughed. Shortly thereafter, she started reading the book to her father. Two things he hadn’t lost were his mind and sense of humor. He joined in to keep up with Karima’s laughter, and before long he left to go to the bathroom – without the walker. You can see Karima’s review at Amazon – it’s also on the page I have for it at bobcooks.com – and her words about the miracle of laughter at her home can be found on the page I have for that book.
11. That’s funny

On occasion, I’ve heard people say, “That’s funny.” However, they don’t laugh, unless they do it and I just can’t hear them. Maybe it’s an internal thing. This behavior almost seems to be hypocritical, which I will get into soon. And yet, one of the best things you can do is laugh so hard that you cry. You can’t beat a good belly laugh, which may have been produced by that person who replied with the two words that are the chapter title.

In the past, I would occasionally watch Late Night with David Letterman or The Tonight Show with Jay Leno. Until it was replaced with Conan, I had been watching The Tonight Show every night. Actually, I taped and watched it the next night or two days later, even if only the first half of the program. One thing I noticed from viewing both shows was that for Leno, people would laugh, whereas there was polite applause for Letterman. They were clapping because the audience liked what they heard – all well and good. I prefer the uproarious laughter approach. Is it possible that by their response, the people in the studio at Late Night were really indicating, “That’s funny,” rather than “That’s uproarious”?

Then, there is the person who utters some bit of humor and follows it with something like, “Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.” This falls into the same category as Naomi, the waitress who temporarily became Jerry’s girlfriend and had an unusual way of laughing, almost hyena-like. That was the reason why our hero ended the relationship even before she was partly to blame for burning down the cabin in one of my
favorite episodes of *Seinfeld*.

In February 2008, I had a book signing at Talking Leaves Books in Buffalo. The number of books I sold that night was in the single digits, although it came very close to being no digits – I sold a single book. I still had an enjoyable time, and one individual mentioned that his son stated that everyone is a hypocrite. If you really think about it, you’ll tend to agree, despite any attempts not to fit into that category. Some people feel that hypocrisy has to do with religion, but it’s not solely limited to that. The definition of the word hypocrite is simply someone who says one thing and does the opposite. This covers a broad range of possibilities.

They say that people don’t change and that seems to be true. What someone was at sixteen will not be very different from what he is at sixty-one. The change could be that a teenager had strong feelings on global warming but now forty-five years later he is a member of an organization working to alleviate the problem. If someone was a petty thief at an early age, she might expand to stealing higher priced objects later. There has been a change but some things haven’t been altered. Even people who seemed to have modified their behavior over the years still remain their basic selves.

This of course implies that there are quite a few young hypocrites in the world and we’re stuck with them. There is always hope that somehow they will change with time. Along the way there are so many aspects of society that almost make that impossible. When it comes to politics, we are all aware of drastic changes in the presidency of the
United States because four years in the White House usually results in the occupant aging almost double what is expected. There is another kind of change that seems to grip senators, members of the House of Representatives, governors and anyone else in positions of power. A leader may have had high ideals before being elected, but on so many occasions corruption seeps in and one cannot fathom what this person becomes. All the scandals in the nation’s capital, including handcuffs on a lobbyist or jail time for a senator illustrate that power has the ability to corrupt. Shortly after Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, we witnessed a few people declining positions in his government for various reasons, especially related to paying taxes. This was soon followed by the revelation that the new appointees just hadn’t bothered to make the appropriate payments required by the IRS. The truth of the matter is that much of this could have been avoided if there were an equitable system of taxation – what we have today is much too complicated, favoring the rich with their high priced lawyer thieves. Simplifying matters would be welcome by all taxpayers.

That’s hypocrisy, and I have illustrated numerous other cases of it, including the woman who went camping with her boyfriend but on her wedding day ended the camping thing as a way to see the country. We all know people who advocate healthy eating habits, but then go off to the one-price buffet and the servers at the restaurant have to put on riot gear. Politicians say one thing to get elected but then once in office, they don’t carry through with what was part of their campaign. It could be that the newly-elected president gave his or her best but the Congress and the
lobbyists prevented legislation from being passed. On the other hand, one president twenty years ago made a promise which wasn’t kept, and not only did I use what he said in the title of the first book I had published, but he also failed to get re-elected. His son was more blessed in his pursuits, but the American people weren’t so fortunate. This has happened many times before that mess and it will happen again.

People who post “I support the troops” ribbons on the back end of their car while lambasting those who demonstrate against the war are hypocrites. The best possible scenario for the men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan would be to return home. It wouldn’t hurt the people of those two countries either. In my book on war, I commented on a few individuals who supported the war in Iraq, but when asked if they would enlist, came up with various excuses for not having a tour of duty in the Persian Gulf, choosing a round of golf instead.

Another type of hypocrisy was displayed by our youth during August 15th to August 18th of 1969 at Woodstock. In truth, the happening of music, love and drugs took place in the town of Bethel in Sullivan County about forty miles southwest of the town for which the festival is named. This group of people – many of whom could be classified as baby boomers – defied authority with their behavior. Somehow they depended on the establishment, since they needed to eat and drink. They may have brought sleeping bags and material for getting high, but left everything else home. No man is an island.

Wall Street people advise investors to hold on to a stock – perhaps even saying that now is the time to buy more
– while secretly clearing their own portfolio of it. Many examples of this have landed individuals in the slammer, while others have managed to sneak off into the night unnoticed. When a sale is questionable and the seller comes before a judge, if the magistrate is a friend of the father of thief, don’t expect him to serve any time or pay any fine. It may not even be investigated. In recent years, banks and Wall Street have acted in cahoots, and one of the reasons for the economy tanking has to do with this behavior. The truth of the matter is that greed has become an overriding factor in their quest for riches and power.

When it comes to research at the university, there’s another concern about finding the truth. If a study shows a chemical to be ineffective, and if you’re the scientist making this discovery and turn it over to your boss, who is subsidized by a company that produces this material, you may be asked to moderate the conclusion of the study, ignoring the truth. This won’t help anyone, especially future buyers of the product – it may even kill them. The corporation may feel that it is in their best interest to have the drug produced, but could be wiped out completely by a lawsuit. The question I have is why would any company grant funds to a university for a study that they don’t like? Why not just lie and save all that money? If you’ve read a few of my books, you know that these companies seem to have less intelligence than a head of cabbage.

Being a part of the Cheektowaga Citizens Coalition brought forth challenges for both the people in the town as well as the workers at the quarry, landfills and asphalt producing plant. Many of the employees just didn’t see the
harm their employer was fostering on the community – ignorance is bliss but don’t use that defense in court – or else didn’t want to lose their job, despite the toxic effects. Materialism plays a huge role time and again, as it does in the case of the citizens of Cheektowaga, who don’t want to make waves because it could cause a decline in property values. These people may have seen their neighbors and family members suffer from illness – some even dying – but they continue on, without saying a thing.

I mentioned the Nestlé Company earlier and wonder if I wasn’t a hypocrite by working there. Fortunately, I didn’t remain there long and could be excused since I didn’t know better. I was young and naïve, and yet, ignorance shouldn’t be an excuse. What about others who labor at jobs that pollute the environment and harm the people? Len Ackland describes the bomb-building process in his excellent – but not recommended before dinner – book, Making A Real Killing: Rocky Flats And The Nuclear West. Those employed in the process earned large paychecks but many paid with their lives for it. Those who justified what they were doing as not building a bomb, since they were only doing part of the creation at their job, seemed to be hypocrites. Since they hung around for the money, maybe they were just doing it for the big bucks.

I mentioned editing previously, but there is another type of editing that drives artists crazy. I’ve only written one novel and felt that it could make a decent motion picture. Naturally, the movie would only resemble the book slightly, since you know what Hollywood will do to what a writer has produced – they write a screenplay. Because of this, I don’t
think I want my effort transcribed to the silver screen. I won’t compromise what I have done. This is one type of editing, but there is another that bothers artists: the process that is done by television stations before a movie is shown on the screen. The excuse that this exercise is done for time and content just doesn’t hold water.

If time is a factor, why not show the entire movie and work in the commercials to fill out the remaining time allotted. Thus, a ninety-minute movie can be shown in a two-hour slot and a two-hour movie will require two and a half hours. I don’t think that this is unreasonable, although, what is wrong with a movie beginning at 3:48 pm? Hence, it seems that this time restriction is not really necessary.

The more important hypocritical decision on editing comes when words are bleeped out, and that is all too obvious in the showing of a movie. In fact, if a word is substituted for the obscenity, everyone laughs at the replacement but realizes what the original word was. So then, why bother with this dumb substitution? I’m not advocating obscenities, callousness and crude language – I believe in free speech along with responsibility – because vulgarity is a sign of immaturity. At times, it can have great impact, and in other instances can result in some great hilarity.

An example of the former can be found in the 1973 movie, *The Hospital*, while an obscenity uttered in the 1972 movie, *Where’s Poppa* typifies the latter situation. I saw each of these flicks many years ago at the theater, but watched them in the spring of 2009 on a local station in Western New York that shows a great number of classic
movies. In each case, bleeping took place, especially at the close of *The Hospital*, when a phrase is uttered about performing an act of removal of liquid waste from the body, which is difficult when the wind is in your face. I think you know what I’m referring to here, but the only words audible on my television were “it’s like” and “wind.” Something was definitely missing in the translation.

Another film that I saw on that same channel at around the same time was the 1984 production, *The Hotel New Hampshire*, and once more, that same dumb tool of editing was applied. This was in spite of the fact that all the action in the movie at the hotel featured incest, promiscuity and even an action on the part of the family dog that usually is relegated to immature boys in film, based on too many burritos. Violence and sex are fine, but an off-color phrase is out-of-bounds.

People who point out that our education system and corporate America need fixing, but still attend school, and then become a part of big business have to be called hypocrites if they do nothing to fix the problem. Unfortunately, many people know and complain about things that are wrong, but merely take advantage of the system. As of March 2009, the world’s economy is in the worst shape in decades and instead of people working together to fix it, certain people – that is, the Congress – do nothing but complain, rather than come up with some good ideas.

In the early 1980s, I was teaching a few classes in computer programming – specifically the COBOL language. Joe and I were the first instructors in the day school portion of this new endeavor – we put together the syllabus – and
Andy taught the night classes. At the end of the first session, we passed out evaluation forms to the students. In general, I received good reviews, but one person really laid into me. This individual had very little to say about me that was good. Nonetheless, the last words of the critique said that it was a great course. I could be wrong, but I think I had something to do with that.

I have already mentioned the plane crash of flight 3407 not far from my home. At the end of February 2009, there were a few services held for the families of the victims of that tragedy. I was informed of a group of people – they may have been lawyers and I know in truth that they had contact with attorneys – that was planning to make an appearance and do some picketing at a few churches here. They even had a name, which I won’t provide since they wanted publicity – it would also do a disservice for the real church with a similar name – and their sole purpose was in the name of hate. They didn’t seem to be prejudiced as they hated everything, or so it appeared. The people of Buffalo didn’t harm them in any way, although as videotapes showed, a spokesman lied about that, and the group failed in their efforts. They illustrated hypocrisy to the highest degree since I don’t believe any church has a precept for hate, of any kind. All right, I will grant you that we should all hate sin, but you know what I mean.

This wasn’t the first example of that type of behavior and it won’t be the last either. Too many churches have people in them that are hypocrites. That will never change because a church is nothing more than the people in the congregation. Buildings of stone can’t be involved with truth
or untruth. However, if we could see fewer hypocrites in our churches, this would go a long way to making the world a better place.

This brings up another argument that should cause some concern. It may not have always been so, but certain churches work with others, while some refuse to believe that there is any other true faith but theirs. This is partly based on the truths of one religion, which the other might not accept. Since faith is such a fundamental basis for many religions, members have a right and should be encouraged to question beliefs in the church. Not to do so would be irresponsible. After all, the church is not infallible and there have been times when hypocrisy was part of church history. If church A claims to be the only legitimate one, and so do churches B, C and D, doesn’t that indicate that there is no true church? This might upset some people, but recognizing other denominations as worthy of our respect makes a great deal of sense.

On March 1, 2009, I was visiting in the hospital and from the TV monitor came the strains of a televangelist, one of my favorite sources of hypocrisy. On that day, the television was too loud and the medium might help to bring to light my feeling for those people – the first four letters describing these people tells the story. Everything was confirmed in my mind when I heard the pleas for sending a check.

You have all heard about preachers who shouted for repentance and urged the people to sin no more. That may have been appropriate in so many instances, since this man of the cloth was discovered to be cheating on his wife. Now
he was seriously in need of being forgiven, but he certainly didn’t practice what he preached. In other churches, the behavior might be slightly different, but leaders have delivered sermons about avoiding sin when they secretly had been anything but good examples for their flock.

There are people who advocate one thing but then act in a manner different from that, and don’t consider themselves to be hypocrites. This is due to missing intelligence – they just don’t know or can’t even make the connection. This is like the leader of a country who claims to be peace loving but then leads the country into war to fight terrorism. Perhaps these people are just overcome by the power of the office. I can’t believe that there are some people who advocate the right to life and simultaneously have no problem whatsoever in accepting the death penalty. They may even not object to war as a solution, not even considering negotiation as an alternative.

Society almost dictates hypocrisy with its examples on television in the soaps and reality shows. Parents have an impossible task in teaching their offspring about this when they themselves are hypocrites and have been for many years. Part of this behavior is caused by the fact that we are all human. All our good intentions don’t match what we wind up doing. If it did, it would be a boring world and I’d have to search elsewhere for more material for my books.
12. Science versus technology

Before getting into the consideration of the difference, we need to look at time and measurement. When someone tells you the time, they probably don’t say it’s exactly four o’clock, but they won’t add the word approximately, either. But they should, or at least say that it’s about four. That’s as close as one can get because if someone said, “It’s four o’clock,” it would no longer be. Time is an approximation, even if you have an atomic clock. I have an old alarm clock in my spare bedroom. The radio still plays fine, but that’s about it. However, that clock is exactly right twice each day. Still, it’s about as useless as the clocky. If you’re not familiar with that device, I mentioned it on page 72 of my 2008 book, *wake up – it’s time for your sleeping pill*, with my ideas for making that gadget better. You could also google it on the internet.

Measurements are also approximations. To say a piece of wood is three feet long is an estimate. Even if it lined up at three feet on your measuring device, you couldn’t say that the board is exactly three feet long. If you really want preciseness, mathematics will provide it for you, since it is an exact science. With it comes other problems, however, such as these words, “I hate math.” I didn’t say them since I love it, but many others have uttered those words. As you may have guessed, it’s time for a geometry lesson, but it won’t be painful and there won’t be a test either. You know how I feel about those things.

In mathematics, as in other systems, there are certain basic elements, such as a point and a line. The former is not
defined but it has neither width nor length and merely represents a location somewhere. A line is obtained by connecting two different points with a straight edge. It has a length but no width, and this creates a huge problem. As a teacher, how do I represent both of these things on a PowerPoint screen? The class won’t be able to see them. We compromise by doing a representation while keeping in mind just exactly what each of these is. Mathematics is an exact science and we are just doing the best that we can. On the other hand, time and measurements are approximations or rough guesses, not unlike *computer science*, which has good intentions but is limited to being close. With each passing day, those two words in italics are approaching the point where they don’t belong together.

When I first became involved with computers, we were advised that these things would make our lives so much better. There were tasks that would take much too long to do manually that the computer could do in a great deal less time. Calculations that couldn’t be performed by humans could be done with computers. This was a fact even with the rounding concept – a necessary consideration in these machines. You’ve heard the expression, “If you want to foul things up, buy a computer.” That wasn’t the case in the early days, but it has become true with the advent of PCs, the internet and email. I spent so much time on these three in my 2008 book on the failure of technology, that I won’t repeat those stories here. I have new ones to relate.

Early computers, such as IBM mainframes, were monsters. These were followed by others from Prime, Digital Equipment Corporation and Wang Laboratories, of which I
was familiar because of my contracts at various corporations. All of these systems had difficulties from time to time, but they worked and indeed our lives were better. Then came the not-ready-for-prime-time PCs and all hell broke loose. You might say that the PC of today deals in approximations – it works approximately some of the time. In my view, a computer that doesn’t work five percent of the time, doesn’t work. The Apple and Microsoft computers that we use at home are no improvement over the small personal computers that preceded them. A few examples of the mess that has been created are updates to software, which come just about every day. Any computer that solves numerous problems by doing a restart is Particularly Challenging (PC.) Those pop-ups on my screen aren’t welcome – I’m not referring solely to those when I’m on the internet – and especially frustrating when I see the question, “Do you want to do a restart now?” Sure, why not, even though I’m editing a document. I’ll protect my work by doing the restart later, when it’s convenient, but the same question will confront me in a short time. If the phone rings and I’m in another room after I leave the scene of book editing, the restart could happen without my approval. The result is that I’ve lost some input that I have to do all over. Oh, joy!

You can save time and money by using online banking – well maybe. You’ll save the cost of the stamp and the time to write out the check, but you will pay in other ways. Actually, it might be quicker to send the payment rather than doing it electronically. I speak from experience. For one thing, bank and credit card web sites aren’t that user-friendly and need much remediation. With the bank I used
for my checking account until recently, I went through not one, not two, but three logon screens – three too many. There is no reason why I can’t go to the site and see my transactions instantaneously. The technology exists to direct me there without entering a logon ID and password because the bank web site can track and identify who’s logging on to the site since it knows the identification of my PC. If we have the technology, why not use it? Now you know one of the reasons why I have a different checking account.

With online transactions, there should be security as far as your checking account and credit card numbers are concerned, but don’t bet the ranch on it. Fortunately, we as consumers have power and a great deal of protection just because we use a credit card. We can dispute bills that get tossed onto our Discover Card without our approval. Not only can we obtain an appropriate reversal and maybe an extra added bonus – I have experienced this on a few occasions – we can also shut down a corrupt corporation that needs to act more ethically, if we work together. Sadly, some of these companies can’t even spell ethics.

Too many web sites don’t have it right. On numerous occasions, I have had to search for the way to log on to see my electric bill. If I have done it before, it should be easy now, but it’s too confusing – made so by design flaws. When I decided that I needed a web site, I had no training in web site creation, but I took a two-day class at the University at Buffalo and figured out how to do that. People have praised my site, and one writer – whom I met only once – called it a gold mine. One person didn’t like it, but from his email his credibility matched that of Pinocchio – no offense intended if
you’re a puppet.

Email may correctly be referred to as spam because of what it has become – notice I didn’t use the word evolve, here. Any solicitation to spend money on a product you really don’t need, or even one that you might actually consider, is spam. If someone sends you an email with FW in the subject, or if you receive an email that isn’t very nice, these too are spam. Asking for a contribution becomes spam when you see an email month after month from the same charity. A demand to send an email on to at least ten others, otherwise you’ll turn into a telemarketer, is spam, just as a request for your bank account number to place ten million dollars into your checking account. That doesn’t seem to leave too many emails as meaningful correspondences, meaning ninety percent or more of what is in your electronic mail is trash, junk, crap or something stronger.

This junk has only increased our workload, even if we are retired. Yahoo email software checks everything incoming and places it either in the inbox or the spam folder – there is also a trash folder, but no junk folder (that may be coming). Sometimes good mail goes into the wrong folder and bad goes into the inbox, but there is an option to have your spam hang around for a week or month, whatever you choose, as well as the option to have it deleted before you see it. I chose the latter option, but every so often, I would still see an email in my spam folder. Maybe the system needs a good bloodletting. You can imagine some of the other possibilities for email providers, most notably when important email sent to you doesn’t arrive and others don’t receive correspondences that you send. This is
communication that isn’t spam and there may be no indication that what you sent didn’t make it to the recipient. It will only get worse before it gets better.

What infuriates me are people who swear by their computer while simultaneously using foul language at it in the privacy of their home or office. Men and women say that they love their PC. That’s a bit off since love is usually offered to other people, not to machines. The word, like, would be a better choice, but even that is a lie. A more accurate picture would be obtained by saying the truth: this computer of mine is so frustrating, bug- and virus-infected and in need of improvements, but somehow I tolerate it. The thought of tossing the PC out the window at times only confirms this reality.

Over the years so many people have agreed with me on this feeling of mine about the deficiencies of the computer and the need for making it workable – some even refuse to use a piece of crud (PC) or other form of high tech gizmo because of the complexity and problems – that I’m not sure what some of the others are smoking. Maybe they’re partying with Michael Phelps. Even if you work for or own a computer company, it would help mankind by taking action to fix the mess of technology rather than hiding in the sand and pretending that all is well. I shouldn’t have to bring up these phrases: system processing, file not found, does not like recipient and start up file missing or corrupt. There are more details of my adventures in Press 1 For Pig Latin, my 2008 book on the failure of technology.

A book that fits right into the discussion of science is one I read in the summer of 2007, The Sky Is Not The
Limit: Adventures Of An Urban Astrophysicist by Neil deGrasse Tyson. I don’t think he’s connected to the chicken business. If you’re not one to read books by physicists, I don’t blame you. Nonetheless, this is one excellent book by one brilliant scientist who will inform as well as entertain you. You may have seen Nova Science Now, his PBS series that returned to the tube recently. I missed the show in its absence, but am happy to see Neil doing his thing again. I highly recommend it and you can probably find DVDs of the show at your local library. Having seen the program after reading his book – he has a new one out in 2009, The Pluto Files: The Rise And Fall Of America’s Favorite Planet – I was channel surfing one day when I saw someone about to introduce the next writer on CSPAN: Book TV. When he mentioned the word astrophysicist, I figured it had to be Neil and sure enough, it was. I managed to watch the presentation all the way to the end without changing the channel.

When it comes to other branches of science, many of the same ideas are incorporated into those disciplines in order to find the truth. Physicists reason to conclusions in the same manner as mathematicians with their slide rules. Costanza is not included here, but marine biologists dive into the ocean to observe various life forms, thus coming up with conclusions about the deep. Botanists study plant life and archeologists uncover fossils and enter caves to find facts. It’s a bit different for those studying the Milky Way, solar system, the planets and stars. How does one arrive at a conclusion about something so vast? We are quite aware that a star that we gaze at after the sun sets may have burned out millions of years ago – that doesn’t simplify matters in the
least. Despite these challenges, astrophysicists still offer answers to life. The only difference is that it’s more difficult to arrive at these conclusions and more of a challenge for anyone to believe. This brings us back to the meat and emphasis of the chapter.

Mathematics may be quite challenging, but it is a pure science. The twentieth-century PC might be an art, but it’s nowhere near pure and is nothing more than an approximation to a great technological tool. Consumers deserve much better than what we have. Companies can make money on a better product — a great deal more than by selling the product in the form in which it currently exists. If anyone wants to make a good living, come up with a replacement for the personal computer of today. I suggest elimination of the mouse as well as a replacement for Windows. My preference is a menu-driven application, not unlike what the first computers utilized. As you can tell, I’m a scientist as well as an artist.
13. I challenge you to a debate

A movie I enjoyed immensely in the winter of 2008-2009 was *The Great Debaters*. I borrowed it from the library when I saw that Denzel Washington was involved in the flick. Denzel is one of our best actors today, as witnessed by his great performance in *X*, the story of Malcolm Little – he changed his name after his first day in algebra class. Some of Washington’s other performances include those in *Wilma, Much Ado About Nothing, Mo’ Better Blues, Carbon Copy, Power, For Queen and Country, Cry Freedom* as well as all the movies that you know of – over forty in all and some in production. He also starred as Dr. William Chandler on *St. Elsewhere* for one hundred thirty-seven episodes from 1982-1988 and produced and directed the 2002 movie, *Antwone Fisher* and *Hank Aaron: Chasing The Dream*.

Besides playing the role of Melvin B. Tolson in *The Great Debaters*, he also directed it. Tolson was a real-life professor at Wiley College in Texas in the 1930s who challenged his students to be the best in the school’s first debate team. The movie has this small group taking on all the other schools in the area in debate and beating them – all but one school. Eventually the Tolson forces defeated Howard University and then Harvard in argument. Those last two victories may not have been true, but just about everything else in the movie did take place.

There are many great stories of people rising to conquer the injustice and hardships that befall them, such as *Rocky* and *Seabiscuit*, and this certainly applies to the debaters in Wiley College. In this case, there is one concern
that entered my mind, having to do with the different positions to be debated. In any argument, there will always be one side that I would rather take and one that I would avoid having to defend. Obviously, when exercising the mind, in order to be more knowledgeable, one needs to see the other person’s point of view in order to be a winner. However, as an outsider, I take a side based on my preference, so if the Wiley team was assigned the conclusion that I favor, it seems like the deck was stacked. When the good guys win the debate, we have the desired ending, but it seems somewhat contrived.

Despite this, debating does bring information that is welcome. To have an opinion with research and experience behind you is to be applauded, but closing one’s mind as well as dominating the conversation may not be in everyone’s best interest. I mentioned the movie, *Doubt* earlier, which emphasizes just this point. It stars Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman as Sister Aloysius Beauvier and Father Brendan Flynn, two ordained religious who battle each other in their quest for the truth. Their journey is accompanied by its companion, doubt. You may not like the way things progress, but you will talk about the motion picture for some time and realize that something else is present as well, hope. Listening is part of the process and it can be beneficial to both parties. When countries negotiate, one talks while the other listens and then the roles are interchanged. If a nation enters a session with conditions set for the other country, that restriction seems to be dictating matters and limiting possibilities. Not too much will be accomplished. Going into a debate with the intent of winning
and not learning from the encounter doesn’t foster growth for the people involved.

I dedicated *This War Won’t Cost Much* to my eighth grade teacher, Sister Justine, who died in early 2009 at the age of 93. When I delivered a copy of the book, I didn’t get to see her as she was in the chapel for Mass. Because of her declining vision, I’m not even sure if she could read it, but at least she saw the book and was pleased with my effort. Months before it was complete and I mentioned that I was working on it, she told me I should write a book about peace, which is really what the book is about. One day I received a call from a woman who ministered to Sister Justine. She said she read my book and liked my effort. She also said she agreed with George W. Bush’s decision to initiate the war in Iraq. She wanted to meet me and even have a debate on the book. If you follow my thoughts on debate, you probably realize that one thing I’m not crazy about is having that type of discussion. If I haven’t convinced someone who read my book that war is not the answer, it would be a huge waste of my time to spend another minute with him or her. In this case, the woman seemed to be humoring me while not truly against war.

Just as *The Great Debaters* was filled with many facts, it has a few fabrications as well, which are dictated by Hollywood. I thought about pointing out the fact that movies are less likely to be about veracity than books, but the two are so similar in that regard that it would be inaccurate to make that statement. Each is a story, with some events you see on the screen or read in a book that actually happened. On many occasions at the start of a film you will see the
words, “This is based on a true story.” For one very specific screen presentation I saw those words before the movie began, but after the movie ended, I saw a disclaimer that denied any amount of truth. What I had witnessed wasn’t very memorable, so I couldn’t tell you the name of the feature. I’m sure that this happens on many occasions.

Hollywood modifies a book to produce a screenplay, which then becomes the final product that we sit in the theatre to view – or in our homes watching a video or DVD. Sometimes there is no book, just a screenplay and on a few occasions, the product is so repulsive or such a waste of our time that we feel there was neither a story to start with nor something written before production. Naturally, for the silver screen there will be embellishments for entertainment value, but that isn’t much of a change from what is found on the pages of a book. After all, the author wants to sell her books and a bit of tweaking may spur sales. Even so, just as books are somewhat biographical, whether fiction or not, the same can be said for movies. I find that I enjoy the supplemental parts of videos that just aren’t available in the theatre. It’s the bonus presented for not having the big screen in front of you.

In most cases, books are better – whatever that means – than the resulting interpretation on DVD. Some books are too short for a full-length feature while others may be too long to be made into a movie. In each case, the flick is still produced, but there have to be omissions since certain details aren’t necessary while others might result in snoring in the audience. Even in two of my all-time favorite movies, *Seabiscuit* and *Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil*, bits and pieces of the two books upon which the flicks were
based couldn’t be part of the Hollywood production. Still, Lauren Hillenbrand and John Berendt created two works of non-fiction that I can’t recommend highly enough.

After viewing the movie, *Marie Antoinette* with Kirsten Dunst, I decided to read more on the queen’s life. Watching the extras on the DVD gave me the name of an author who had written a book about Marie. I found it in the library and stumbled through it. It seemed to be too long, but a good sleep aid for insomniacs. Here is a case where the movie – even with the Hollywood treatment – was better than the book. Another movie that I enjoyed but didn’t get past reading the first chapter of the book was *The Color Purple*. The stumbling block in this case was the dialogue, which was necessary, but stopped me in my tracks. There are quite a few books that use this same technique of language, but some carry it off better than others.
14. Some statements aren’t precise

In one of my books I talked about a trip I made down south in 2006 to visit Charleston, South Carolina, Savannah and St. Augustine. Before publication, I checked everything over, as did my editor and proofreader. I also did some proofreading after all this, but found that I had made a mistake. The trip was actually in 2005 and no one caught it until I did. What I had for the date wasn’t true, but it wasn’t really a lie. The facts just weren’t precisely right, and I was the only one who could have found the discrepancy, since the others couldn’t have.

In the early part of 2009, I was reading some book and the author mentioned an event in the year 2000, “the first year of the twenty-first century.” Having majored in mathematics – a pure science – I was a bit upset because once more, there was another inaccuracy. I’m sure the book was edited and proofread, but no one caught the error or just didn’t comment on it. There’s no doubt that many who read the section of the book with that statement were guilty of exactly what those checking the book experienced. This misconception of millennia and centuries has been taking place for so long that even before the third millennium, I wrote a chapter of a book of essays discussing just that issue. Having taught math for a few years, it may be time for a short lesson to clear up the matter.

To begin with, most of us are familiar with two designations of years, BC and AD, which are separated by the birth of Christ. The years before that event are designated as BC, and all the years after are referred to as AD, which is
the acronym for the Latin, *Anno Domine*, or year of our Lord. The last year in the former was 1 BC while the first after the birth was 1 AD, which is usually referred to without the AD. However, there is another hitch here, namely that Biblical scholars argue that the real birth year of the baby Jesus was anywhere from 6 BC to 2 BC. We’ll keep our BC and AD distinctions the way they have been for centuries rather than making any adjustments accordingly, which would wreak havoc on all our calendars. With that in mind, the first millennium began in the year 1 (or 1 AD) and consists of one thousand years. Counting out one thousand years, we see that the last year of the first millennium is the year 1000. If you say that it should be 999, you’ll be one year short. The second millennium begins in the year 1001 and ends in the year 2000. The third millennium – the one we’re in currently – started in the year 2001 and will terminate in the year 3000. If you still disagree with these boundaries, I’ll have to use smaller numbers.

I could consider centuries. I shouldn’t have to convince you that we are currently in the twenty-first century. The dispute might arise as to the starting and ending years of this or any century, for that matter. Instead, let us consider a decade and work up from there. *Decade* comes from the Latin word meaning 10. Hence, a decade consists of ten years. Let us now agree that the first year of the first decade was the year 1. This of course is AD, not BC and considering years having to do with BC will not be discussed. You should now agree that the first decade was finished at the end of the year 10. Simply count the years, 1 through 10 and if you think it should end in the year 9, you’d
be short one year. The second decade started in the year 11 and it too consisted of 10 years. The end of the second decade came on December 31 in the year 20. You should be convinced that the first year of each and every decade ends in a 1 and the last year of that same decade ends in a 0. The decade we are currently in, as I write this on March 16, 2009, began with the year 2001 and will end on the last day of the year 2010.

Having considered the decade, let us now look at a century. This time period encompasses one hundred years. The first century started with the year 1 and as you might expect ended on December 31 in the year 100. This concept is similar to that of the decade. The second century started on January 1 in the year 101 and it ended on December 31 in the year 200. I have already pointed out that the century we are currently in is the twenty-first century, which started on January 1, 2001 and it will end on December 31, 2100. If you disagree, recall that each new century starts in a year ending with 01 and ends in a year ending with 00. The 20th century began on January 1, 1901 and ended on December 31, 2000. When the media were discussing the greatest people of the twentieth century as the year 1999 was drawing to a close, there was still another year to go before making any conclusion as to the final list.

All this would change – whether we are talking about decades, centuries or millennia – had there been a year 0 to separate BC and AD. Since this wasn’t the case, using the standard definitions of a decade, which we talked about, and a century, which is one hundred years, and finally a millennium, which is one thousand years, our conclusions
here point out that the first year of the twenty-first century wasn’t 2000, just as the last year of the previous century wasn’t 1999. This means that all those millennium parties at the end of the nineties were a year early. There’s nothing wrong with having a party a year early or even having parties at the end of 1999 as well as a year later.

One of the great saxophonists of all time was John Coltrane. If I’m not mistaken, I was introduced to him by accident, but even had that not happened, I’m sure I would have eventually bought one of his CDs. I owned the record he made, *Selflessness*, and I’m not sure where it is today, but his CD, *My Favorite Things*, is in my collection, today. On that disk you can find a bit of information about Coltrane, one fact of which is that he was born in Hamlet, New York. It also stated that he and I were born on the same day in the same month, but he was actually born in the city named in the state of North Carolina. Someone forgot to proofread the information ahead of time before it was placed on the back of the CD. If the state was incorrect, the birthday may also have been.

You see many factual errors on television as well as in the newspapers — you could say that things weren’t precisely as reported — for a variety of reasons. I mentioned my challenges in producing books with no errors, whether grammatical or factual, and this is no easy goal for anything brought into print. If it’s a book, report on a screen, magazine or newspaper, having the facts right will always be a concern. For a book, a writer has weeks, months and in some cases, years to get it right. An editor of a newspaper has twenty-four hours, so you may see a few mistakes.
That’s to be expected. Nevertheless, his goal, and mine as well, is to reduce these to an absolute minimum.

Publishing the truth is not an easy task to accomplish, but other obstacles stand in the way as well. Reporters who create copy without research or don’t travel to the scene of what they should be covering reduce the integrity of the article. Sources can also have an effect since they must remain confidential. That fact will influence the reporting as will an owner who really isn’t that concerned with the truth. He could be just like George Costanza’s boss at Kruger Industrial Smoothing, who couldn’t be bothered by anything, clearly illustrated by his use of the word, “Whatever.” Another type of head honcho may only be concerned with selling newspapers, rather than offering the readers anything other than entertainment.

The small errors can be overlooked, although individuals write letters to the paper with corrections of grammar and notices of misspelled words. Apparently, some people need more hobbies. I assume these correspondences are all tossed into the trash, although you may see a correction a day or so later about a mistake in a previous edition of the news. Bigger inaccuracies have a more dangerous and lasting effect on readers. A headline story on page one could offer something about a celebrity or politician that just isn’t true. Two days later, there could be a retraction with an apology by the editor, but it may wind up on page 31, where many might miss it. Another danger is that the original bit was on a day when someone saw it but the correction followed on a day of the week that the same reader didn’t purchase the paper. Even if initial coverage and
remediation were on the front page and read by everyone, there might be another difficulty. Readers believe what they first read and that may be an impression that will stay with them, regardless of the reality that exists.

Unethical and corrupt as it sounds, this very strategy can be fostered by a political party in order to slander a candidate. I used the idea in the beginning of my novel, in which the candidate who was behind in the polls just before the election eventually became the president – all on a lie. It has happened in a few elections in the past, and probably will repeat itself in the future. I’ve already mentioned the Swift Boat Veterans’ book during the United States election in 2004. It doesn’t matter if the nation in question is a democracy or a dictatorship.
15. The Rashomon effect

You may have seen *Rashomon*, the 1950 Japanese movie directed by Akira Kurosawa. It’s the film based on two short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, “Rashomon” (for the setting) and “Yabu no naka” (for the story line.) A crime is witnessed by a few onlookers, but when each reports on the incident, the telling of what they observed seems to indicate that they were all at different places and were describing entirely unrelated incidents. The effect is that perception may vary despite the similarity of the conclusion. This phenomenon is something that occurs on many occasions.

The truth may be before us, but there could be disagreement on particulars, sometimes resulting in disputes. This has to do with a few factors, including our state of mind, reasoning process and experience. In February 2009, I was at the Erie County Medical Center and wanted to use the phone in one of the rooms to make a call. It seemed to me that the service was free to all patients, unlike the past when it was necessary to pay for it. The phone seemed different from other phones I was used to – it had a cradle as well as the communication part – but I couldn’t see the number pad. I figured it didn’t have one as it was meant for incoming calls only. That wasn’t the case as the pad was on the part of the phone that hung on the cradle, rather than on the base, where I was expecting it to be. In this case, I made a judgment based on my experience as well as a perception. Unfortunately, it led to the wrong conclusion.

This is not unlike the Rashomon effect, which
creates different images of the same event for witnesses. That may be why there are arguments as to what is the truth. In the case of the phone, I had a certain feeling that turned out to be misguided, even though it was not an unreasonable conclusion to make. Note that there was no attempt by anyone for deception. The truth is there, but sometimes we just don’t see it.

With all the advances of technology, we are faced with many more challenges. In the spring of 2009, I finally met Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., having been in contact with him over the last few years. At the end of 2008, I sent him a copy of my book on the environment, since he is deeply concerned about it. His leadership in the Natural Resources Defense Council and Riverkeeper may be familiar to you. Not long ago I was the recipient of a signed picture of RFK, Jr. and his dad, taken in the 1960s. Even before that, Mr. Kennedy sent me a photo of himself immersed in a body of water, except that he was surrounded by ice. I assume this was a trick accomplished by what one can do with photos and a bit of manipulation. Either that or he was a member of the polar bear club.

Somehow I feel – and hope – that what I saw in that picture was contrived, something that is easily done and can lead to false impressions. They say the camera doesn’t lie, but that may only have been true at one time. In many respects the Polaroid, 35 mm or digital camera doesn’t present untruth, but men and women can create a situation that goes against reality. A video can be assembled by splicing bits and pieces from a politician’s speech. The result is a slice of ETC, but people view it, and come off with a
different representation of that leader. Before it signed off the air, you could see this same manipulation by watching the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. Viewers are intelligent enough to realize that the adjustments are done for a few laughs, but on too many occasions the people tuning in may be completely fooled.

In the 2008 book, *Standing Up To The Madness: Ordinary Heroes In Extraordinary Times*, authors Amy Goodman and David Goodman state that, “Many eminent historians and economists are concluding that George W. Bush has earned the distinction of being the ‘worst president ever.’” I have to agree with this assessment, and he receives this prize on the basis of his serving two terms, the state of the economy when he left office, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and global warming. A few of these he caused and the others he did nothing to prevent, certainly actions not worthy of a true leader. His actions were ongoing for some time, and a few years ago someone referred me to a video that had been made in which he confessed to his crimes. It was bogus, of course, but probably had more truth in it than much of the reporting by the media during his tenure in office. Once again, technology can cause a great deal of confusion and one wonders about its veracity.

Perception is very important. I mentioned my 2003 book about lotteries. I should emphasize that it is a novel of deception, and right along with that is illusion. In March 2009, I viewed the very entertaining 2006 movie, *The Illusionist*, starring one of my favorite actors, Edward Norton – no relation to the character on the *Honeymooners*. Norton plays the magician, Eisenstein, in turn of the century
Vienna and does it so well that quite a few viewers will be fooled, myself included. This only means that the motion picture really works as intended, despite the fact that our hero gave us enough clues so we wouldn’t be taken in.

I watch quite a few movies on DVD, and I enjoy watching the special features for insight. This movie was no exception and I found that the illusion continued on another level in those video extras. Edward Norton is a good looking actor, but when he commented on the film, I saw a very humble person, who appeared to me to be not quite as dashing and debonair as the character he portrayed. Don’t tell him I said that. I won’t reveal any more since I don’t want to spoil the ending for those who haven’t seen the film.

In the movie *Rashomon*, the reporting by those who saw the crime was based on perception, but may have involved deception as well, had they viewed the incident on film. That will make it more of a challenge to find the truth. Suppose the incident winds up in court and an individual steps up to the stand, takes the oath and begins testifying. People may raise an eyebrow because this person was not on hand to view the perpetrator commit the crime. Should he be involved in bringing out the truth? In this case, people aren’t concerned about veracity or expenses incurred in order to render a decision in the court of law.

We have witnessed the overturning of rulings in court because of DNA evidence, even from crimes of decades ago. The person responsible for this revelation wasn’t on the scene, but that doesn’t matter. As a result, a man is released from a prison term of many years where he served time for a murder that he didn’t commit. A prisoner about to be fried
instead is freed to try to lead a normal life after fifteen years behind bars. In a few cases, I have witnessed complete forgiveness on the part of the prisoner. I applaud him for his attitude of calm, but I doubt that I would have been so compassionate. In a few cases, witnesses have stepped forward, insisting on the innocence of the accused. Despite this, there may not have been a re-trial, and the guilty escaped punishment while an innocent individual didn’t.

I don’t watch CSI, hospital and cop shows on television, but I’m sure there’s much more veracity in them than many of the shows of decades ago. The validity of what they do and what is displayed for the viewing audience points out the fact that DNA and other means of investigating can uncover the truth. Another person who may dig up some good data is the insurance man and the collision specialist. An accident may point the finger at René as the cause of the collision, only to be overruled later by Joe from the collision shop. After looking at the vehicle involved, he determines that Chris, the driver of the other car, had to be traveling at least fifty miles an hour to inflict the damage on René’s car. Since the speed limit in the area of concern is a mere forty miles an hour, René may not really have been the cause of the mishap after all.

Joe from Frank’s Body Shop didn’t see the accident, but his input was crucial. There is another person who claims to be an important witness to what happened, but she saw the result of the collision, and not what actually caused it. On too many occasions this type of individual tries to have an impact on the proceedings when she really doesn’t know what happened. She is no more valuable to the adjudication
than the person who saw everything but refuses to be involved.

I close the chapter with an exercise, related to the movie mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. I’m sure it’s been done many times before, even if with slight variations, and could be called the relay or rumor practice – maybe gossip is a better choice for the name. This is a variation of the *telephone game*. We will start with ten people in a circle and the leader of the group will quietly read a sentence or phrase into the ears of the person to his left. An isolation booth could also be used, if available, especially if the group is blessed with above average hearing. After all, we don’t want to compromise the test results. This person on the listening end will then repeat the process to the person on her left until eventually the last person hears it. At this point, he or she will stand in front of the group – and with a recording device operating – tell what she heard. People might turn to others in the group, almost suggesting that what was offered wasn’t what they heard or repeated. To really shake things up, the leader will finally read the original bit from the paper. If not enough conflict exists at this time, the tape could be played for all the participants.

As you can guess, results will vary depending on the creativity of the people. Experience, perception and family situations can enter into what will be recorded. Name-calling could also result, so it may be a good idea to have all guns checked at the door. The difference from beginning to end may be so drastic that you might feel that the truth has really been distorted. Actually both may be the farthest from the truth, since each is merely a story.
16. Conspiracies

Some people refuse to accept the idea of conspiracies because they don’t believe they exist. This type of person never took a course in logic or was absent from class on more than one occasion. There are others who point at almost every unusual occurrence in life as a conspiracy. Both views are extremes and each is overlooking reality. To start with, Webster defines a conspiracy as a secret agreement to do an unlawful or wrongful act. This boils down to more than one person’s involvement and something nasty. Any serious look into the past will positively conclude that there have been numerous examples of just such actions. I completely agree with the words of the great writer, Nelson DeMille, when he says, “A conspiracy is not a theory, it’s a crime.”

You need not go that far back to see a conspiracy or two. You may recall in early 2001 the meeting of the Cheney energy policy group. The fact that the press wasn’t allowed to cover it as well as the absence of certain organizations – specifically, those who were in favor of green alternatives to the fossil fuel agenda – should convince you that history had at least one conspiracy. In the spring of 2009, Cheney thought he was still president, whereas for the previous eight years, he never came out of the bunker – or so it seemed.

The lobbying efforts in the nation’s capital are another example, as is the collaboration of the health care profession – not all the doctors, but enough of them – with the cigarette companies. A physician who advocates a puff or two as good for one’s health, who himself smokes a pack
a day, and cigarette manufacturers are co-conspirators. It only got worse when the latter injected chemicals into the product to induce addiction, which resulted in the death of too many people. *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, And Deadly Persistence Of The Product That Defined America*, by Allan M. Brandt, has much more to say on this issue, with especial resistance to accepting the truth when it shatters someone’s fortune or lifestyle. Brandt mentions an article by Evarts Graham, *Beyond Any Doubt*. He quotes Graham as saying that experiments “show conclusively” that a substance in cigarette smoke *could* produce cancer. Graham seems to be going out on a limb, here. Brandt is much more conclusive when he states, “Because of its tactics, the tobacco industry would come to be singled out as the preeminent example of corporate irresponsibility, greed, and the failure of business ethics.”

Collaborations between doctors and businesses or between the government and the corporations gave us numerous examples – as pointed out above – and they have been going on for years. Moreover, it doesn’t take two entities to pull off a conspiracy. By itself, the corporation – mostly big business because I have a great deal of respect for small business people and I hope they don’t turn into criminals as well – has been a great example of a conspiracy because of its modus operandi. You can look at all the criminal corporations that are incorporated outside the United States. By this movement, they display nothing more than greed and deception, without paying taxes. Shipping jobs off to Third World countries to maximize profits with downsizing or layoffs of American workers smells a bit like
a conspiracy to me. It gets even worse. A corporation that wants to be treated like a human being is one thing, but then this status can’t be used to protect this same corporation against lawsuits and as an excuse for not paying taxes, which so many companies do each year despite record profits. Something is not right in this situation.

When big business winds up in a lawsuit or settles out of court – the excuse they use is that they don’t want to be dragged down by this trivial action – they wind up offering a payment to the plaintiff. Obviously they’re admitting guilt in the matter, and yet time after time you will hear a spokesman say that the company admitted no wrongdoing. Yeah, right. Let me see if I get this straight. The corporation has all the high priced lawyers on their side and probably the judges as well, and they’re going to settle and not worry about their good name. What we have is a payoff with the promise of the payee keeping his mouth shut and not suing, ever. I know, because I went through just this same scenario. I could have refused the money, but most likely I wouldn’t be writing this book, if you get my drift.

Only two individuals are necessary to have a conspiracy, but in many cases similar to corporate swindles, three parties are involved: the government, big business and the legal profession. When a company pollutes the environment and the government goes along with it, that’s bad enough. Justice is served for the victims when a judge rules against the criminal and awards the plaintiffs with remuneration, and the guilty party cleans up the mess it made. Unfortunately this outcome has been short lived on more than one occasion when for some reason that ruling is
It seems to me that in the election in the United States in 2006, when the people expressed their disgust with the war in Iraq – signaling a desire for our country to leave the Middle East – those in power in Washington, DC engaged in exactly what doctors and cancer manufacturers were doing. American men and women in uniform are still in Iraq and Afghanistan. The results of the elections of 2000 and 2004 were a bit startling to people who believed in democracy. One person couldn’t have pulled off the results in both cases, and once again, not one, but a pair of conspiracies arose. Had they not, the United States and the world would have been infinitely better off. By now, all the non-believers should have changed their minds since it seems that conspiracies and Santa Claus don’t belong in the same category.

For those of you who believe in the Easter Bunny but aren’t so sure about conspiracies, you need not look further back than the spring of 2009 to see a few more examples. Some of the participants in more than one crime include Bernard Madoff, AIG, Wall Street and the banks for starters. If a further explanation is still necessary, maybe it’s time to arise from the bed, realizing that Rip Van Winkle hasn’t been around for some time, even if he was fictional.

Returning to the twentieth century will reintroduce us to the days just after Reagan became president. It didn’t take him long to dismantle the unions – that may have qualified as a conspiracy, but if not, it wouldn’t be long before Iran-Contra graced the headlines of the newspapers. Leading the players in the starring role was Ollie North, accompanied by Robert McFarlane, the president – whose Teflon finish
enabled him to escape blame – as well as another future president, George Herbert Walker Bush. He was out of the loop, or so he claimed – his hula-hoop broke and he somehow managed to escape.

Some of the same participants from that debacle were also involved in other conspiracies from the previous decade, putting their experience to good use, even without a resume. The bible mentions the water gate, but it doesn’t predict the Watergate that gave way and flooded Nixon and his crony crooks out of the White House in 1974. I’ll get into CSI and evidence later, but in the case of Tricky Dick, the paper trail that he left as well as the one he didn’t leave – the eighteen minutes of space on the tape that disappeared – did him in. Some of the criminal clan included writers and evangelists – or an unreasonable facsimile thereof – who managed to make a few bucks off the scandal. There’s nothing like ingenuity, creativity and lack of shame.

My 2008 book on the environment mentions quite a few conspiracies having to do with spoiling the earth and killing off its people. In many instances, these disasters were allowed because of a marriage between government and the corporations. The list includes the Exxon Valdez, Katrina, my hometown of Bellevue, Love Canal, Rocky Flats, Chernobyl, Bhopal and Three Mile Island. Cover-ups usually imply conspiracies – I can’t think of one that doesn’t, and we’ve had a few cover-ups – and right along with both of these, one has to include commissions. In the beginning, a gathering of men and women to seek out the truth has no hint of a conspiracy. However, somewhere along the way, the actions of people in power change that almost immediately.

The Shenon book is evidence that the 9/11 Commission was just like the Warren Commission of the last century – a whitewash. Sometime in late 2008, I viewed a program on PBS about the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The main problem is that it was balanced, but doing so it offered one view which insinuated that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Two authors featured on the program were Mark Lane, who wrote *Rush To Judgment: A Critique Of The Warren Commission’s Inquiry Into The Murders Of President John F. Kennedy, Officer J. D. Tippitt, And Lee Harvey Oswald*, and Priscilla Johnson McMillan, who wrote *Marina and Lee*. Lane is an investigative reporter who has done a great deal of research on the events of November 22, 1963 and clearly establishes that JFK’s death was a conspiracy. I’m not sure of Johnson’s credentials, but she seems convinced that Oswald acted alone. I can never prove this, but all signs point to the fact that Oswald never fired even a single shot at the president. Johnson’s argument relies on her observations about the shots that Oswald fired on General Walker. If Lee didn’t fire the shots, then Johnson’s case completely falls apart.

I will grant that her argument has a touch of validity, but it completely breaks down because Oswald missed his target. Hunting friends of the alleged assassin vouch for the
fact that he was a good shooter, but on his failure to hit the targets on one of their outdoor adventures, they stood by their man by saying that the ducks or geese were moving targets. The vehicle in which the president was riding was in motion! There have been numerous books on this that support the contention that Lee couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn with a bazooka from five feet away. All right, that’s a slight exaggeration, but there seems to be a great deal of agreement that he was not proficient at firing a gun. You will find a writer or two insisting that Oswald was a sharpshooter, but trials to duplicate the firing of the three shots within the limited timeframe with the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle could not be repeated, even by trained marksmen.

Lee claimed that he was a patsy, and that was what he turned out to be. There are a host of other considerations that just can’t be ignored. Oliver Stone’s movie, *JFK*, was panned by a few critics – I hope they at least watched it – but the movie gives a great deal of information and insight into what happened on that dark Dallas day. All the activity around the grassy knoll and the disputes as to how many shots were fired certainly can’t be ignored. The wounds that were inflicted on Kennedy from the front as well as the splattering of the brain of the president lead to nothing more than at least two shooters. When it comes to a magic bullet, I think the fifth letter of the second word should be replaced with three other letters that spell out a masculine possessive, but not in that same order. The fact that there was an entry wound on the front of the president’s body indicates that that bullet was really extraordinary, as was the realization that the bullets that were used by the gun discussed could not have
ripped open the head of Kennedy the way it did.

A few other considerations that add weight to a conspiracy on that day are the Warren Commission – with omissions of people who had stories to tell – the deaths of witnesses just before they were to testify in court and the Jack Ruby rubout. Ruby, Oswald and David Ferrie may not have been on the same bowling team, but they probably had a beer or two together. The fact that Kennedy had many enemies didn’t help either. The Castro people as well as the anti-Castro people weren’t happy with him, nor were the mob, the military – since he was about to abandon Vietnam if re-elected in 1964 – J. Edgar Hoover and certain fringe elements of society.

As far as books on the assassination – and there is an endless list of them – we can probably dismiss a few of the books, since even a novel of historical fiction may not be that appropriate in our discussion. Earlier, I mentioned the book, *Case Closed* by Gerald Posner, and wasted some time reading it. The author’s contention agrees with Priscilla Johnson and we can dismiss it for that reason as well as the omissions in the book, which had great significance. The title he selected may have been more appropriate for a fraternity party after the last bottle of Labatt Blue was consumed and all the empty bottles returned to its receptacle.

One of the books that I felt I should read was *Passport To Assassination: The Never-before-told Story Of Lee Harvey Oswald And The KGB Colonel Who Knew Him* by Oleg M. Nechiporenko. I thought it might have some great insight into the assassination. Once I began reading it, I was led to believe that Nechiporenko felt that Oswald had
accomplices. However, about three quarters of the way through the book, the writer mentions that Lee did the dirty deed alone. His reasoning had to do with an incident in the Oswald home. Marina was watching Kennedy on television one day, when she commented on how handsome he was. On hearing this, Oswald became a bit jealous and this triggered him to go and eliminate the president. Shooting Marina would have created a mess in their home. Before I picked up the book, I should have realized that the author had nothing to gain by spilling the beans and that one shouldn’t put much credence into books written by spies, even after they retire. There have been other preposterous theories such as the one that Jackie had it done because of her husband’s womanizing or that LBJ was somehow involved. This latter possibility may not be that farfetched.

A few other sad and depressing moments graced the American public with the assassination of Kennedy’s brother, Robert, as well as the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers and Malcolm X during the dark days of the 1960s. All of these smacked of conspiracy along with the incidents at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. There, a few instigators had much to do with the chaos, something that has occurred before that time and continues even today. On too many occasions, the police are blamed for the violence, but they are merely scapegoats as the majority of the men and women in blue are upright citizens, just trying to keep the peace. I, Pig; Or, How The World’s Most Famous Cop, Me, Is Fighting City Hall, by Jack Muller with the help of Paul Neimark, is the short but engrossing account of a cop who took no flack from higher-
ups. Many officers of the law have no qualms about payoffs from time to time, but Muller wasn’t brought up that way and fought the system, despite the fact that he seemed to be waging a losing battle. His courage is to be highly admired despite the fact that complete candor in the book couldn’t be presented, for reasons of litigation and retaliation.

Muller’s tale is biographical, but the 1973 movie, *Electra Glide In Blue* is a creation of Hollywood that reflects the good cop / bad cop confrontation, which takes place at the same time as the *Woodstock Festival* in 1969. Robert Blake brilliantly plays John Wintergreen, an officer of the law who tries his best to do what’s right, even as others around him are resorting to violence in order to solve a murder. The beating and harassment don’t rise to the level of Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib, but they’re uncalled for and don’t solve anything. This interrogation effort fails miserably in uncovering any information in all cases.

A movie of a similar outlook that I watched in March 2009 was *The Big Heat*. Glen Ford plays tough cop Dave Bannion in the mold of John Wintergreen as he investigates the apparent suicide of a police sergeant. Well, that’s what the powers that be wanted everybody to believe, but it was a great deal more complicated. When Bannion digs deeper, he upsets quite a few people in organized crime along with their co-conspirators in the police force. Doing his job just causes havoc, including the murder of his wife.

The presidential elections of the twenty-first century weren’t the only ones that were manipulated, and this theft is not limited to nations that provide an essential component for banana splits. If you’re still not convinced of that fact, feel
free to read *Was The 2004 Presidential Election Stolen?: Exit Polls, Election Fraud, And The Official Count* by Steve F. Freeman and Joel Bleifuss and *A Black Way Of Seeing: From “Liberty” To Freedom* by Paul Robeson, Jr., the son of the great scholar, outstanding athlete, actor, singer and activist. *How To Rig An Election: Confessions Of A Republican Operative* by Allen Raymond and Ian Spiegelman is a book right from the horse’s mouth, which gives more insight into how to pull the whole thing off. Unfortunately, tampering with the results of this nature is not limited to this century, nor do the Republicans have a monopoly on it.

In 1960, my preference was John F. Kennedy over Richard Nixon because I don’t approve of crooks. Someone has said that all politicians are crooks and he may be on to something, but if you don’t vote, you have no right to complain. That election was not without some manipulation since there were certain factions that were involved that had much to say about the winner that year. You should realize what I’m talking about if I mention Chicago – a great city, but not one in which people in power have scruples. I believe everyone should have the right to vote, but not after you leave the earth. Gore Vidal’s excellent novel, *1876*, indicates that there’s nothing like a rigged election on the first centennial of a nation. How many other elections were rigged, whether presidential or for other offices in government? Since any of these manipulations for victory involve the efforts of more than one person, once more we have to conclude that a conspiracy is involved.

In the summer of 2008, I finished reading a scary,
eye-opening book, *The True Story Of The Bilderberg Group* by Daniel Estulin. If you read it, you may have nightmares and your life may never be the same, but you will find it difficult to put down. Estulin discusses the conniving greed of a group of people that have been around for centuries – I should correct that to type, since I don’t believe you will find anyone still living who was around when Christ threw the moneychangers out of the temple. These people form the secret society that controls the world by waging perpetual war so that they will remain perpetually rich, living off the working class. There are a host of books on the Federal Reserve – which many assume is a United States government organization, but it’s not – the Council of Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission.

*Thieves In The Temple: America Under The Federal Reserve System* is a 2004 book by Andre Michael Eggelletion that tells of these same evil people who created banking systems a long time before the Federal Reserve came to be. Their type goes back centuries and they were responsible for the Revolutionary War fought between the colonists and the British, the Civil War and just about any other war you can imagine, including the war on terror. Those thieves were the reason for the Great Depression – had I been around, I don’t think I would have considered it to be great – recessions throughout the years and lastly, what the world is facing economically in 2009. Eggelletion mentions that our income tax is unconstitutional and the late Aaron Russo deals with this fact in his 2006 documentary movie, *America: Freedom To Fascism*. Besides the already listed parties, the participants in this huge conspiracy pointed
out by Eggelletion include the Rockefellers, Morgans and Carnegies. Another book that I haven’t read but probably will pick up soon is G. Edward Griffin’s, *The Creature From Jekyll Island: A Second Look At The Federal Reserve*. I don’t believe the author is related to Peter Griffin, but Eggelletion relies on this book for numerous quotes and insight.

One of the arguments against conspiracies – and not a very good one – is that a group of people wouldn’t stoop so low to commit a particular horrific crime. Another is that it would take a great number of people to keep secret about what happened, and that would give it away. Perhaps that’s why an unusual number of deaths of people occur, especially of individuals who are about to take the witness stand in court. Others might deny the possibility of a conspiracy by concentrating on one aspect of the conspiracy, while failing to look at the whole picture, even though it really doesn’t take much to raise questions about strange occurrences and coincidences. Before I started writing this chapter, I was aware of a few conspiracies. However, it is quite clear to me that the number of those that we are aware of – just in the last hundred years alone – is overwhelming. This does not even touch on minor ones or those we don’t know about. I close the chapter with this question. Does a person who denies a conspiracy, when it is clear that one has taken place, exist as a co-conspirator?
During the last week of March 2009, I had two book signings. At the second one – which was a benefit for a friend of mine – I sold three books at a closeout price after closing time. I usually don’t reduce the price when the event is over because then many people will delay buying the books until the last moment. That’s one truth to consider, but I figured the reduction might lead to another sale or two, and since it was for a good cause, I hoped for a few more dollars, even if the party was over. Another truth about doing these book things is that you should never leave early – stay until the very end, and even longer, if you can. In fact, at the Corning Craft Show in November 2008, I sold seven books at three o’clock – just when the whole affair ended. Had I escaped a bit before that time, I would have lost out in two respects: fewer sales and the opportunity to meet some nice people.

On that day of the benefit in March, after I signed the books, one of the individuals mentioned friends of hers who experienced history in Iran. I’m not sure exactly what was said, but what came out was that what we have been fed by the press and the government wasn’t the whole story, qualifying as ETC. In this case, as in so many others, it really doesn’t matter if you’re discussing a dictatorship or a democracy.

Throughout different periods of time, many writers, economists and ordinary citizens have had a few things to say about governments and truth. In early 2009, I finished reading a very insightful and enjoyable book by Ben
Yagoda, *Will Rogers: A Biography*. It’s the story of a cowboy, Cherokee, actor and great American. One of Roger’s astute observations was, “I don’t make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts.” As I pointed out already, Jay Leno incited a great deal of laughter by doing the very same thing each evening on the *Tonight Show*, and he continues doing that today at 10 p.m. each night, so you can tune in if you missed the news of the day.

I mentioned once before – and I will refer to it again – Thomas Jefferson’s feelings about choosing between the press and the governing body in power. Many consider him to be our greatest leader in that position, but didn’t he have a few slaves on his plantation? Another person of great stature was Edward R. Murrow, who made quite a few noteworthy statements, including, “Most truths are so naked that people feel sorry for them and cover them up, at least a little bit.” There are many great journalists today in his mold, but the truth is that there are not enough of them.

“If you want to know about governments, all you need to know is two words: Governments lie.” These are the words of Isador Feinstein Stone. He self published *I. F. Stone’s Weekly*, which at one time in the last century was rated sixteenth in a poll of his fellow journalists. John Swinton was the former New York Times Managing Editor in the late nineteenth century. One of his thoughts was, “The business of the journalist is to destroy the truth; to lie outright; to pervert; to vilify; to fawn at the feet of mammon.”

Malcolm Browne wrote a great narrative of his coverage of war news in his 1993 book, *Muddy Boots And*
Red Socks. He writes, “War news may be factually correct but very unrealistic in context, and therefore misleading. (I could add that all news, not just war news, necessarily distorts objective reality to some degree.)” Soldier as well as journalist, Browne adds, “Governments do lie when they feel it is necessary. It is equally a fact that reporters in a free society are paid to penetrate and expose official lies.” He further confirms that war brings with it the disappearance of truth when he points out, “What I know of the war was what I had gleaned from newspapers, newsreels and popular magazines – the sources which I now know can never be entirely trusted, especially in wartime.”

Each chapter of my 2008 book, This War Won’t Cost Much – those five words in the title are the furthest thing possible from the truth – begins with a quote or two about that awful alternative to negotiation. One of the generals quoted was President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who warned about going to war after having witnessed the atrocities, but whose very actions in the White House in 1953 resulted in the Iran hostage crisis and many wars that followed. For insight on just what I am referring to, read All The Shah’s Men: An American Coup And The Roots Of Middle East Terror, the 2008 book by Stephen Kinzer.

Most of us like surprises, but once in a while, one comes along that isn’t so pleasant. A few months ago, I read a related book by Gary Sick, October Surprise: America’s Hostages In Iran And The Election Of Ronald Reagan. The title referred to the manipulation done by the Republicans to guarantee that Reagan would be inaugurated president in 1981. What was needed was to guarantee that
the hostages in Iran weren’t freed until the election of 1980. As you know, all this was accomplished, but in April 2009, I read another book by Barbara Honegger with the title, *October Surprise*. However, the *surprise* in this title was in reference to Carter’s efforts to have the hostages freed by the time of the election. As it turns out, that surprise was countered by another one from the Republican Party, with huge repercussions for the United States and the world. These are still being felt today.

What Honegger reveals is that the actions of the Reagan / Bush contingent triggered an even larger result than was seen in what we know as the Iran-Contra affair. Contrary to what many believe, that sordid adventure had its origins a few years before the 1980s. As evil as these efforts were by the Reagan / Bush team – perhaps even more criminal than Watergate – very few of the principals were punished for the wrongdoing. Had those in captivity in Iran been released before the election, historians agree that Jimmy Carter would have been re-elected president in 1980 and it’s very possible Ronald Reagan would never have made it into the oval office, except for visits, had he been invited. This outcome may have been so monumental that we would still have had bushes around our houses and on the grounds of the White House, but none would ever have served as president of our land. That possibility itself would have rewritten history.

When one arises from slumber on November 1 each year and sees the waxed windows or missing tires on his SUV, he may surmise that he has been a victim of an October surprise. This is small change compared to the one
that is discussed in the Sick and Honegger books. Sadly, there was to be another in the election year 1984, since the events going back four years before that had been revealed to a few people, even if the Iran-Contra Scandal had not been news just yet. Because of the seriousness of the crimes that put Reagan in the White House and directly resulted in that scandal, if enough voters weren’t aware of the happenings, a diligent press should at least have had the guts and courage to interrogate those in power to reveal the shenanigans. That after all, is the duty of the press. Needless to say, a bigger surprise followed four years later when even without the knowledge of the exchange of hostages for guns – and plenty of them – George H. W. Bush was elected president.

Speaking of guns, Honegger points out one moment on inauguration day in January 1981 where the smoke could have been seen in a few time zones, if only people were paying attention. Almost immediately after Reagan was sworn in, the hostages were released. Those held captive were not free months afterwards, or weeks, days or hours, but exactly after the oath was administered. The government of Iran wanted to be assured that Ronald Reagan was president and the conclusion of that ceremony certified that fact. Those two events happening within moments of each other are conclusive proof of the October Surprise being carried out.

The surprises that followed in the following two elections were also effective because of a number of factors. Jimmy Carter – in both 1980 and 1984 – and Michael Dukakis in 1988 could have made a good case for the arms for hostages exchange agreement except that, according to
Honegger, they were held back because that exposure could have resulted in people they knew, being held against their will, never being freed, or much worse. At first I could accept that, but then it occurred to me that the revelation would have been better for the country and maybe the captives would have been freed anyway. We will never know if that would have been the case. Of course, since the media were aware of all the evil manipulations – or they should have been – they failed to do their job by exposing what they knew.

Throughout history, there have been great journalists who risked their lives in many ways to expose the truth. Today, you can find a handful of these men and women as well. Being in a war zone is a health hazard, but exposing corruption puts a writer in danger from those who want to keep their deeds hidden. That is a good reason why the coverage just wasn’t there. Reporters knew about it, but were hesitant to cover the story. Those who cared to air what they knew may have been stifled by the management of their publication, whether it was *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *Time Magazine* or any network news program. The story may have been written, but it never made it to the public. This had to do with corporate control in conjunction with the government, which oversaw what the media would broadcast. This marriage of corporate America with the nation’s ruling body has been going on for years and with time, only gets stronger and harder to disrupt. It didn’t make any difference which party was in power.

As I mentioned, I am a member of the Working Families Party (WFP), which should come as no surprise
after having my 2007 book published, *This Page Intentionally Left Blank – Just Like The Paychecks Of The Workers*, a finalist in the Indie Excellence 2007 Book Awards. They may be more criminal than their counterparts, but I don’t believe that the Republicans have a monopoly on crookedness. Going back to the beginning of the Republic, it’s very difficult to compare those early parties to what we have today, but all the Founding Fathers had slaves on their plantations, with the exception of John Adams. We had scandals with teapots, mistresses in the White House or close by – Clinton wasn’t the first as Eisenhower had a friend that Mamie wouldn’t have wanted at her Tupperware Parties. Lyndon Johnson wasn’t a one-woman man either and we all know about John Kennedy – as well as all the aforementioned other illegalities. What about the improprieties that were never uncovered? Truman was faithful to Betsy, but didn’t he drop not one, but two bombs on Japan? Wasn’t there a better way to end World War II?

Franklin D. Roosevelt had his mistress, Lucy Page Mercer and I doubt that Eleanor was pleased when her husband uttered the words, “Here’s Lucy.” Nelson Rockefeller is reported to have died in the company of his girlfriend and George Herbert Walker Bush was rumored to have had a mistress, as was the son who followed his dad to the Oval Office. Even the man who was said to be our greatest president, Abraham Lincoln, issued a proclamation suspending the right to writs of habeas corpus nationwide in September 1862, and was rumored to have had dalliances with people other than Mary Todd. Perhaps politics does something to the person who ascends the throne besides
turning his hair grayer than it should have been over the duration of his presidency, no matter how long the term. On Jay Leno’s last night on *The Tonight Show*, he mentioned that when he began the gig, his hair was black and the president was white.

In late 2008 you may have seen the PBS program on Lee Atwater, the operative responsible for a few individuals winning elections on various levels. He never seemed to be concerned with scruples, and even after being overcome by a brain tumor, his apparent repentance wasn’t very sincere, as the special pointed out. One of his disciples was Karl Rove, who elevated manipulation and nastiness to an unreached high by his actions. *Boy Genius: Karl Rove, The Brains Behind The Remarkable Political Triumph Of George W. Bush*, the 2005 book by Lou Dubose and Jan Reid, offers some of the gems that Rove originated, including the abominable moves he made to destroy John McCain in his bid against Bush for the presidency in 2000, as well as seeing to it that Max Cleland lost to Saxby Chambliss in his run for the Senate in 2002.

In December 2006, I finished reading the appropriately titled book by Lou Dubose and Jake Bernstein, *Vice: Dick Cheney And The Hijacking Of The American Presidency*, which relates a few things about Bush’s vice president, who most people thought was really running the country. John Nichols’ *Dick: The Man Who Is President* gives more insight into that issue of who was in charge. I thought I knew about Cheney before, but I didn’t know . . . – I think you know what the last word is, but if not, it’s a four-letter word ending in “ck.”
Another book that from the beginning of the title appears to be a biography of Tim “The Tool Man” Taylor – but it isn’t – is *The Hammer: Tom DeLay, God, Money And The Rise Of The Republican Congress*, by Lou Dubose and Jan Reid. It’s the critical biography of the man who rose to become Speaker of the House – I wouldn’t want him in mine – by two veteran Texas journalists. DeLay was a small town exterminator from Sugarland, Texas, so perhaps he just continued what he had been doing before he made it into politics.

There are quite a few more books that you may want to read about criminals in politics, many of which can be found in the recommended reading at the end of *This War Won’t Cost Much*. If you don’t have the book, you can always proceed to my web site and page down to the back of the book to find the list. One not mentioned there is a fine book by a great woman, which is simultaneously a wonderful love story. *Speaking For Myself: My Life From Liverpool To Downing Street* by Cherie Blair relates exactly what leaders in government and their families have to face once they move into the halls of power. I may not always have agreed with Tony Blair, but I’ve always respected what he did, especially in the troubling times at the start of the twenty-first century.

Much earlier I offered our third president’s feeling on newspapers and government. This great American uttered quite a few good words of advice, and I’ll have another of his quotes later. Sadly, from the quote mentioned and what I have reported in this chapter, the answer to the question which makes up its title is no, governments can’t usually be
trusted. Jefferson would be even more upset to see that the media failed miserably doing their job in the years after he left office.
18. What a pyramid!

This chapter was inspired by my friend, Mike McKay of WBFO-FM in Buffalo, an NPR news, jazz and blues station. A few years ago – maybe in 2007 or earlier – I decided to work on my family tree. I had a chainsaw and some pruning tools, so – oh, it’s not that kind of tree. Looking at some of the breakdowns of genealogy designations, I really didn’t want to put it down on paper, as I couldn’t imagine how to make it comprehensible, so I decided to do it through a web site. My plan was to have each family on a single page and then to be able to navigate to other pages, backwards and forwards from the elements on that page. The left column would have my dad and mom from top to bottom, and their children would be on the right, from top to bottom in order of birth. If you clicked on my dad, that action would take you back to his family – his mother, father and siblings – and similarly for my mother. Clicking on my sister, brothers or me would advance to show our families, wives or husbands and offspring. It might sound simple, but as you can see, there are a few challenges.

At one time, it was a custom for the wife to adopt the name of her husband. However, that changed as women started using hyphenated names in order to keep their name visible. This seemed like a great idea and I applauded the effort. It’s not such an appealing idea when one has to put together a family tree. If marriages used this technique of identification, I might have on one or more pages of a family tree the name of Laura Smith-Jones-Hernandez-Choinski-Lopez-Jackson-Lewis-Dorance-Schwartz-Zwierzchacewski-
Wieszczecinski-Swiatek. Things might even get worse. Somehow, the old method was better for genealogies.

On Easter Sunday, 2009, my sister Pat and her husband Lou made dinner at their house and that very day a woman named Pacholski had an obituary in the morning paper. That was the maiden name of my mom’s mother, so it appeared that she was a relative of the family. I did a bit of checking and sure enough, that seemed to be the case. At the dining room table after dinner, I brought out a few family tree questions, and from funeral cards that listed the deaths of Joanna Pacholski and John Pacholski – each had an address of 46 St. Louis Avenue and they died within two years of each other – I concluded that they were husband and wife. Unfortunately, I can’t be hundred percent sure because a brother and sister could both reside at the same address. A friend of mine and his sister live in Thornwood – twenty-five miles north of New York City – and share a condo. Obviously, I made that initial conclusion in haste.

There are many other problems with the creation of a family tree. What happens if someone remarries? I solved that one by listing all the marriages on the same page. How do you visualize cousins through my system? There’s no direct way of listing it since it can only be surmised by searching through a few pages. How about adopted children? I didn’t distinguish between them and natural offspring, but I didn’t include foster children. What about a couple who gives away a child? Do you include both sets of parents? Perhaps, surrogate mothers need to be considered as well as in-vitro-fertilization children. What about people who are clones? I haven’t even considered that until now and don’t
want to think about it.

Going forward, one can see that the tree stops, at least for a time, but retrieving information has no end. The only limitation is to how many names and connections you can discover. Needless to say, you probably won’t have enough time to do all the research and have to place a few limits on the process. However, you can include stories, biographies, photos and just about any other data you can find about the people in the genealogy. It’s fun working on it and quite a challenge, but how do you find the truth when it comes to everything in the family tree?

There’s something else that is quite interesting and remarkable. Start with an individual, Chris, and consider her parents – two to be exact, I think. They in turn, have two parents, or she has four grandparents. Those four have two parents each and those are Chris’s eight great-grandparents. Continuing along the lines backward, each consideration will double and be a power of two, such as sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four and so on. What we arrive at is a tree or reverse pyramid, with the base – in this case top – expanding and becoming larger the further back you go. Let’s return to this web page I discussed and you may think that I could have placed many generations of a family on one page. When I create web pages, I allow each to be able to be scrolled down, but not across the page for a few reasons that I won’t get into. I could allow scrolling that way as far as I need to include ten generations of a family and obviously there’s enough room to accommodate individuals down the page. Assuming that one need not worry about that Laura character above with the hyphenated, never-ending name, this way of
doing the family tree would certainly work. It could be messy and I’d really need a long and wide piece of paper to print out the web page. That may be why I didn’t do it that way.

Let us look at Chris in the other direction. She is one person, but then when she marries, there are two, which could double with two children. When those children mature and have children of their own – of course, that could happen without the parents growing up – the result could be another ten offspring. If this process continues, you can see that we have another tree or pyramid, with the base on the opposite side of what we considered earlier. What in the world kind of pyramid has the family tree become? It seems like it’s nothing more than the brotherhood of man. Here brotherhood denotes no specific sex. The family tree we have created is not a pyramid, or even an hourglass, as it might appear to be. Rather it is an expanding chronicle of a few generations of a family, expanding in many directions.

Returning to the beginning of the second chapter in *Press 1 For Pig Latin*, it mentions a retreat that I attended a few years ago. A participant asked me if I was one hundred percent Polish. Around Easter of 2009, Mike McKay mentioned that he was exactly that, but I’m afraid that a conclusion of that sort may be inaccurate. If someone claims they are fifty percent Irish, one can only assume that one of his parents had an Irish background, whatever that means. To determine this percentage, shouldn’t grandparents be included in the decision making process? If you do that, there’s really no reason to end there, as their parents should also be included. As you can see, we will have to go back
quite a ways to deduce that someone is one percent Spanish. In the cases in question, we can be truthful in saying that Mike and I both had relatives at one time from Poland, and that Irish lass has grandparents who came to the United States from Ireland.

A wonderful documentary that you can find on DVD is *The Journey Of Man*, featuring Spencer Wells, who set out on a long mission to trace his roots. I’m sure your library has it as well. I read the companion book, but it seemed to be too technical and not as appropriate for understanding as the program that aired on PBS some time ago. Man – that is men and women – did not always exist in America, but many claim that the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers was the cradle of civilization. Wells points out that humanity began on the dark continent and that people migrated to other continents. DNA has verified this and thus it will be difficult to find an individual who is one hundred percent Swedish. Based on *The Journey Of Man*, there could be someone who is one hundred percent African, but with all the migrations through the years, even that possibility may not be true.

To celebrate one’s heritage is something we should do, but remember that the truth is that each of us has claim to quite a few countries. As was clear from my experience, a name that doesn’t end in “ski” or “ek” might still refer to a person with some Polish background. In my family tree, I found a family member named Kazor, which is an abbreviation of the name, Kaczorowski, and I have a cousin with the last name of Swacen, which was Swapceinski or something similar. I mentioned the Pacholski connection
earlier, but in my research, I also found different spellings such as Pachulska and Pachulski. The former would be the feminine form and I wouldn’t be surprised to discover a Pacholska also. My mom’s name is Freda, but I have seen documents – supposedly authentic – with the names of Fredericka and Alfreda. When I call a company on my mom’s behalf and mention her name, the people invariably assume that I’m talking about a Rita, so I have to almost spell out her first name.

Dates will be difficult to certify, and the further back you travel, the harder it will become. A few months ago, I removed birth dates from my cousin’s family on their web page after cousin Charlie was victim of identity theft. His sister told me to leave out the date of birth in each case because it may have been a factor in the crime. I don’t believe it was, but then one never knows. The internet has so much information – some accurate and some not even close – that people have very little privacy left today. As you realize though, I will be using much of those resources to complete my family genealogy. That word in italics in the last sentence is there because the verb is an approximation, since someone will have to eventually take over the family tree. In conclusion, perhaps I should correct what I mentioned earlier about the thrust of this chapter. The fact that we are all brothers is indeed true, but I think the more accurate designation we should use is cousin, since that won’t offend the feminists or chauvinists. I have no intention of explaining the variations such as second cousin, third cousin, cousin once removed or cousin forever removed.
19. True or false

Having arrived at this point, it’s time to consider a few statements. Some are true and the others are false. You will have to decide which. I should remind you that everything may not be what it seems, and as you know, this truth deal is complicated. If you’ve had true / false tests in high school or college, I’m sure you found a few statements that could have been either. This is quite frustrating to a student, and it may indicate that the teacher needs more effort in constructing a meaningful evaluating device. The good news is that children are involved, and a student who questions any answer with a valid argument is showing creativity. She’s using her intelligence and that’s a great thing. Maybe the professor actually intended that. On the other hand, a pupil who puts down the wrong answer and wants credit for it, even though his reasoning is far-fetched or non-existent, needs to pay attention and better utilize his talents. It’s time to begin, but fear not since you won’t be graded on it.

War – what is it good for? absolutely nothing

These words can be found in the 1969 song by Charles Edwin Hatcher, who most people know as Edwin Starr. Seinfeld also used this statement when Elaine mentioned to the soviet ambassador that the first six words above were the original title of Tolstoy’s novel, *War And Peace*, which of course – as far as I know – is not anywhere near the truth. The above phrase is the truth, except that Hatcher goes on to sing that war is good for the undertaker.
Even though he doesn’t mention Blackwater or Halliburton, he brings up companies similar to them, as well as the munitions factories, and especially the banks, who stand to make huge profits from any encounter involving weapons and armies. After all, you can extend loans to both sides so they can buy weapons and then continue the gouging when further loans are offered for cleanup and reconstruction afterwards. War is indeed good for something, but certainly not for the environment or the people on the planet.

My 2008 book on war has a list of related books in the references at the end, and one book not listed there – I read it in 2009 – is the book by Amy and David Goodman that I referred to earlier. One of the later chapters of that book describes how combat soldiers stood up to the leaders of the country and the Armed Services, and refused to continue fighting in an illegal and immoral war. They were brave conscientious objectors who witnessed the brutality and waste of battle, specifically what was begun in March 2003. When Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Liam Madden was asked about Bush and Cheney, he referred to them as war criminals – having committed an act of aggression – who should have been impeached for what they did to the Constitution.

The page on my web site for my book on war has a few movies that deal with conflict – it seems like almost every motion picture I see somehow manages to touch on the subject. The 2007 movie, *Grace Is Gone* tells of Stanley Phillips, played brilliantly by John Cusack, who raises his two young daughters, 12 year-old Heidi, played by Shélan O’Keefe and 8 year-old Dawn, played by Gracie
Bednarczyk, while mom is away serving her country in Iraq. When Stanley hears the news of his wife’s death he has great difficulty telling the girls, and the motion picture is all about his grief and coming to terms with revealing the news to Heidi and Dawn. It’s a sad movie that will inflame people against Bush and Cheney and their cronies and precipitate more than a few tears.

In *Grace Is Gone*, writer-director James C. Strouse echoes my thoughts in *This War Won’t Cost Much* when he says that for the death of one person because of war, tens and hundreds of people are changed – family and friends – resulting in generations of people being affected. Multiply those individuals by the number of casualties in a war and there are very few people who will not suffer because of conflict. Stanley is no exception in his grief. When he is on the road talking to Heidi and mentions that you have to trust and believe that you are doing the right thing, she asks, “What if you can’t?” He then replies, “Then we are all lost.”

*You can make a good living by being an artist*

This statement is definitely true provided the right marketing is put in place. Exactly what that is or how to accomplish it escapes me, and I have been involved in those efforts since April of 2002. The first of my books published in 2008, tells of my adventures, with the joys, disappointments, exhilaration and hemorrhoids that go along with writing. If you’re a musician, photographer or any other kind of artist, you know that you can’t give up your day job. That is why being a writer is encouraged, but shouldn’t be initiated except on a part-time basis.
When I worked at Nestlé Foods in the 1970s, my boss Hugo gave me a handful of records that he didn’t want. His brother-in-law – or some relative of his – worked for a company in New York City involved in the music business, so he had access to numerous musical groups via their promotional records. Some of this vinyl featured artists I had heard of, while others were lesser-known musicians. Despite that, there were quite a few records that I really liked. These performers had great talent, but they never really made it big for one reason. They weren’t marketed. I was aware of many who made it to the top with less talent than was audible on these records. This possibility is not limited to Motown, either.

**Historians are our best source for arriving at the truth.**

As I have pointed out, those people may do a great deal of research – at least I hope they do – but still not get everything exactly right. Proof of that can be found in our school textbooks. I’m sure you’ve read books by authors claiming to be historians that were a bit off. That has happened in the past and will occur in the future. Earlier, I gave the name of a book or two found to be missing a few facts. Calling any such book infallible would be very misleading.

**Global warming is a huge myth**

Real scientists completely disagree with that statement. All one needs to do is observe the melting polar ice caps and see that islands in the oceans that existed a
decade ago are no longer places to live unless you’re a mermaid. People who stand by the denial of a pressing issue like global warming are either junk scientists or politicians that were paid off by criminal corporations to suppress reality. They haven’t seen the movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, because for them it’s neither convenient nor the truth. There are a few other statements that shouldn’t be denied, foremost of which is that acting environmentally is a better opportunity to help the economy than staying *fossilized*. Creating green jobs not only can save the planet, it can also result in high-paying jobs and put the United States back again on top as leaders in technology. Surprisingly, *fossilized* is a word, even though George W. Bush is no longer our president.

**A person who reads only fiction is narrow-minded**

If the books in question are trash or romance novels, this certainly may be a true statement, with only a slim chance of being a lie. My mention of the value of historical fiction indicates that fiction can be insightful, revealing and entertaining. Shortly after tax day, 2009, I grabbed a copy of Nelson DeMille’s novel, *Wild Fire*. I was about to mention that it’s his latest book, but it came out in 2006, so he may have a more recent one. I will elaborate more on it later, but it’s like his other novels, insightful and loaded with a great deal of truth smothered in a great story. I do recommend his fiction – especially *Plum Island*, *In Country* and *Night Fall* – even though he writes long treatises.

If the statement above is changed slightly by replacing *fiction* with *non-fiction*, there will be much more
debate about this result. I read much more non-fiction than fiction because of the great deal of fluff in so many novels. I also happen to believe that truth is stranger than fiction. I might add that non-fiction can be just as suspenseful whether it’s believable or not. My best advice for everyone – whether you are a writer, aspire to be one or have no desire to become a starving artist – is to read all kinds of books, written by conservatives and liberals. It will make you a better citizen and keep you more informed. You may even want to tackle the classics, some of which are quite readable. Others can be a challenge.

We should believe everything the government says

If that’s how we feel, we’ll never recover from the malaise that is gripping the nation. Years ago, the bumper sticker, Question Authority was a great suggestion. For a while people followed that command, but somehow too many people became lazy and obsessed with themselves, power and greed. The result was a government that convinced the people that security and terrorism were huge issues that overshadowed everything else. It was no big deal to sacrifice liberty to achieve security. Fear was all around and emphasized by the leaders in power. Terrorism was a war that had to be fought in order to conquer it. That was the main theme but strangely the same people who espoused it claimed that terrorism could never be completely overcome. They were saying that we had to spend the money to eradicate it, but could only hope that someday it would be nothing more than a nuisance.

As in all conspiracies, the leaders had accomplices:
the media. The national news shows and the corporate-controlled press went along with the government, never questioning its actions until suddenly someone determined that there were a few miscalculations. Actions that were meant to solve the problem actually created a quagmire and matters only deteriorated. I need not go into any details since it is quite obvious what is facing the nation and the rest of the world in the time shortly after Barack Obama became president.

**Star athletes and celebrities make good heroes**

Each of us needs someone as an inspiration on whom to model our lives. The recent stories in the news about our leaders on the gridiron, courts, diamonds and Hollywood celebrities should be the first clue that we should look to teachers and parents for inspiration and guidance, despite my recent suggestion about trusting our elders. Many of them certainly know more than we do. Moreover, they haven’t been overwhelmed by vast amounts of money, which have poured into the wallets of those on the political stage, as well as those in show business and the world of snorts. I have a great deal of respect for those who work for social justice and give back since they have so much. If only more would follow their example.

I should also send a message to those **superstars** that some of their cohorts are quite humble. They make mistakes, but admit to their wrongdoing and pledge not to repeat them. Others in the same profession give back to the communities they left and lead others by their example. Some even take the time to respond to us peons and even go out of the way to
assist us when we struggle or just try to help make the world a better place. I may have been a bit hasty in my initial assessment, but I think you see the point about the subject matter as well as many of the overlooked heroes today.

**Television has never been better than now**

I spent an entire chapter on the origin and development of television in *Press 1 For Pig Latin*, which you can check out by going to the page I have for the book on my web site. I can only summarize that there is too much junk being brought to television monitors – high definition or otherwise. Not that long ago, our cable providers gave us the opportunity to channel surf through thirty stations, without finding very much that was worthwhile. Now we can do the very same thing with ten times that many channels to choose from and still not find anything worth viewing.

One of the reasons for this is greed on the part of the networks, since quality is not part of their selection criteria for most of what is broadcast to us. Reality shows cost nothing in comparison to programs of significance. *The Golden Age of Television* occurred many years ago and unless those in power make a great deal of changes, it will never be approached again. The hardware may be better – provided we don’t all receive cancer as an added bonus from our special extra vivid sets – but the software needs much remediation. It’s sad to say, but it’s probably a fact that television has never been worse.

**There’s nothing worse than war**

Some individuals might argue that war is certainly
bad, but abortion is worse. Indeed, the majority of people are opposed to abortion, which deprives birth to a fetus. The action has long-lasting, scarring effects on the mother, as well as many of her friends and family. I can’t disagree with that. War results in all of these things, but on a grander scale.

Consider a bomb that falls on Iraq and snuffs out the life of a soon-to-be mother and the child she is carrying. That is at least twice as bad as the act that terminates a pregnancy. Now multiply that by the number of incendiaries that are dispersed over the course of a war, and you can see that Edwin Starr was on to something in his song. Moreover, the planet has been besieged; the resources of the earth have been wasted on the building of the bombs and on reconstruction when the smoke settles. Entire societies are disheartened and devastated by what a few leaders have initiated, no matter what the cause. You can find further discussion on this in my book on war. The five words I used for the start of the title of that book are as far from the truth as the celestial body Pluto, which some people say is no longer a planet.

Since the majority of accidents happen within ten miles of home, it’s best to be homeless

Speaking of lies or misconceptions, I mention a scenario that some people swear to be true relative to lotteries. (This relates to my novel about those games of chance. You can find this on my web site on the page I have for that book.) A woman decided to move closer to New York City since she saw that more state lotto winners came from that area. She figured that by moving, she could
increase her odds. This misleading statistic is based on the fact that the population is greater downstate and naturally more play the game. Needless to say, there should be more winners from that area. Moving wouldn’t help her one iota.

Here again we see statistics entering into play. When it comes to accidents, maybe we should consider another statement indicating that most car mishaps happen within twenty-five miles of home. To beat the odds we have two choices: always make sure to be as far away from home as possible or don’t drive. That just won’t work. I think we should also rule out riding with someone, unless we are beyond that mile radius in question. This makes no sense either. As you can see, alternatives are quite preposterous when the real answer is to use more caution behind the wheel. This free advice segues into the next statement.

Many people on the road shouldn’t have drivers’ licenses

It wasn’t that long ago that I enjoyed driving. Taking long trips to different parts of the country was something I really looked forward to. Unfortunately, times have changed and there are many days that I wonder why individuals are on the road since they don’t seem to know the first rule of highway safety. They seem to be self-centered and unaware of anyone else trying to reach her destination by car. If, while taking their driver’s test, these pretenders had pulled off the same maneuvers that I witnessed, they would have flunked immediately. Too many people realize that they have to traverse twenty miles to arrive at work, so they allow twenty minutes to do that. Mathematically that may be sound
reasoning, but they forgot to factor in reality. Even with a speed limit of sixty miles an hour, you won’t be able to make it to the office on time, unless you break a few laws – one of which is the speed limit. Apparently they never heard of construction zones, school buses on the road, weather conditions and accidents, which they have a great chance of actually causing. All of these will influence the time of the journey, so it may be more appropriate to allow at least a half hour. Better yet, leave early enough to avoid rush hour – which these drivers makes more of a headache – and plan to arrive at work well before start time.

There is nothing in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights that states that each of us has a right to drive a car or SUV. We are given a license only after passing certain tests, but at that point it is up to us to learn how to drive. This means we need to be responsible. This rights / responsibility thing applies to the road as well as to other aspects of life. Failure to follow the rules will result in a fine and mark on your license or possibly even a suspension for a period of time. I hope you like standing on the bus, which many people are using because of the price of gas.

My sister Pat and her husband Lou were on a short well-deserved vacation in February 2009 to the east coast of Florida. They related a tale of a woman who was stopped for her driving deviations. When the officer asked for her license, she presented a credit card. Maybe she had a high credit limit and figured that would cover the situation. More likely, she wasn’t aware of the most basic requirement before getting behind the wheel. Do you think she should even have a license to drive?
Peaceful demonstrations can result in obtaining justice

Civil disobedience certainly can be used to achieve goals of equality in the world. Jesus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. all preached peace and non-violence and each was a leader who succeeded in this effort. Unfortunately, all three suffered and died doing what they did. This same result happened in the 1989 movie, *A Dry White Season*, starring Donald Sutherland as Ben du Toit, in which the people of South Africa rose up in anger against the ruling classes. They did it peacefully, but the results were still death and suffering at the hands of the brutal Apartheid government. The movie is based on the novel of the same name by André Philippus Brink, and both the book and motion picture could easily have been titled *A Red, White And Blue Season*. Red is the color of the blood shed by the victims in their struggle, while white is the color of the oppressors and blue describes the feeling of the victims, although that is much too sanitized a term here.

This suffering while using peaceful means has been tossed on the people throughout the centuries, as witnessed during the civil rights movement. We saw it at the 1968 Democratic Convention, even after Lyndon Johnson signed a bill to extend equal rights for all, regardless of nationality, color or creed. In each of these instances, the masses of behaved demonstrators were no match for the clubs and bullets of those whom they went up against. In many cases, the latter claimed self-defense, when in fact people were placed in the crowd who instigated trouble, thus making it appear that the real cause for the deaths and injuries was
uncivil disobedience.

**The war on terror will soon be won**

Some people believe this, but by its very nature, terrorism can’t be prevented. It’s a kind of war fought by unconventional means, so a country can’t use their normal approaches of fighting to apprehend these people. It appears that over the last decade or so, a few acts of this nature have been thwarted. Sadly, others weren’t. The ones that were stopped dead in their tracks were done so by covert and overt operations. These certainly work, but more can be done in another way. Since you can’t fight it, why not research the reason for it happening and eliminate the cause. If people have jobs, they won’t have time or the need to join groups that promise seventy-two virgins as a reward. Moreover, if people have food and shelter and are happy rather than discouraged and angry, they won’t engage in acts of violence against others. A country that treats all its citizens as equals will have no need for a huge budget to combat terrorism or to help other nations, since the acts of terrorism will be few and far between.
20. Is truth attainable?

If one can’t trust politicians – I think most of us have leaned that way for years – or the press, internet, radio and television, how do we arrive at the truth? It certainly isn’t easy. Hints of how to do that can be found throughout this book. One way has to do with the quote I promised you by Jefferson, “Educate and inform the whole mass of people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.” Before diving into the answer to the question posed in the chapter title, I should mention two contradictory statements. The first one posits the belief that one can never find out what really happened, while we’re all familiar with the second statement, “Crime doesn’t pay.” (In today’s world on Wall Street, in government and in the corporate boardrooms, that probably should be changed to “Crime doesn’t pay enough.”) This three-word statement about crime offers the clue.

Earlier I mentioned that there has never been nor will there ever be a perfect crime, implying that crime will result in jail time. This last conclusion seems to indicate that we can find out the truth, as witnessed by all the CSI shows on television. Despite the limitations of the idiot box, much research goes into these episodes and uncovering the facts has never been better on many of these offerings. The 2008 movie, Changeling, starring Angelina Jolie, didn’t win the academy award for best picture, but it was one of the best movies that year. Christine Collins has to work on Saturday, the day she promised to take her son to the movies. When she returns home, Walter is nowhere to be seen. Christine
looks for her son, and at the same time searches for the truth, with which the Los Angeles Police Department isn’t that concerned. Corruption in that city’s enforcement agency goes back a long time.

The child passed off to our hero doesn’t fool Christine, even in 1928. With technology today, especially the internet with all its flaws, there are very few deeds that will not be made known, in time. The twenty-first century could be described as the age of information, useless or otherwise. Just log on to the internet or simply gaze at the files on your PC – this is even worse if you’re a writer – and you will see a preponderance of information in folders and on web sites. While some of it dispenses the truth and has a purpose, there is so much that not only is unnecessary, but just adds to clutter and a need for maintenance.

If I talk to an individual on the phone and he asks me for my mom’s social security number, I can’t give it him on the spot, but I tell him I have it and he’ll have to hold on while I find it. In a few cases I can do that quickly, but in too many others, it may take a few minutes. As you might guess, I may have to get back to him because the inquiry will require more research. The point here is that the information is around and secrets will eventually be revealed. I mentioned Don DeLillo’s novel, *Libra*, earlier. The narrative states very convincingly that, “The thing that hovers over every secret is betrayal. Sooner or later someone reaches the point where he wants to tell what he knows.” In so many instances, the perpetrator wants to get caught.

Truth will be obvious, but a few things are necessary, since we may not be able to obtain it from governments or
the media. The answer is research, and this involves digging, discrimination and education. In a few of my books, I point out that having all those cable stations can provide clues to our search, just as long as it is not the only means that we use. Limiting our viewing time will give us more opportunities to check and look at the entire picture by using all the tools at our disposal. That last word should be a good clue that we need to dispense with certain information, which just isn’t on the money.

Reading as much as you can is absolutely necessary, replacing long hours in front of one HDTV, which may provide a perfectly clear picture, but it may not be very accurate or helpful in arriving at the truth. Even some of the documentary channels dealing with science and history have stooped to use the same tactics as reality television, and it almost appears that we are viewing another type of extreme expose. I realize that every station needs viewers, but that seems to indicate that some conspiring is happening.

Perhaps things were better in the past, but during the 1970s, we witnessed another conspiracy while we prepared to head out to the disco. Watergate was in the news and it involved a break-in at the Democratic Headquarters in Washington, DC. I wasn’t glued to the televised hearings, but I did see some of them. The entire world witnessed the destruction of a president who acted unethically and only for his own good. Some people will insist that it wasn’t so bad, since it was merely politics and this kind of thing happens all the time. In a way they were right, because this disgusting incident was followed by the Iran-Contra Affair a decade later, as well as eight years of Cheney-Bush behavior, which
John Dean wrote about in his 2004 book, *Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency Of George W. Bush*. Both of these seem to be greater evils that what Nixon was guilty of, but both Reagan and the Bushes and their cronies escaped without prosecution, so far. It’s possible that we may hear more about the pretenders to the throne in the White House during the first years of the twenty-first century, but the state of the economy seems to be overshadowing any effort to bring justice to the oilmen.

The individual who mentions that Watergate was typical of politics, and that Nixon wasn’t so bad, has a point to make since he did do some good things in his dealings with China and Russia. Had it not been such a big issue, the president wouldn’t have resigned, being the only United States president to do so. If you didn’t have a chance to see the Frost-Nixon interviews that aired shortly after Nixon left office, you can probably find them at your local library on DVD. You could also view the 2008 movie, *Frost/Nixon*, which I highly recommend. I have mentioned that Hollywood takes liberties for a few reasons, but at the same time they are meticulous about details, so that a flick about the 1970s has the clothing, background and everything else that goes back to that time period. The producer and director have concerns about making it authentic and even the actors are immersed in their roles. Frank Langella may have had his best performance as Nixon and the Michael Sheen portrayal of Frost was brilliant, but each actor became the person they were playing. If you watched the extras on the DVD, you saw that Ron Howard, who has been responsible for some outstanding work in cinema, exerted his energies to make
everything right. Accuracy was on his mind and you could see that he accomplished exactly that.

Now, more than ever, this intention has been on the minds of those in show business, as exhibited in numerous movies. On many occasions, the viewer is not seeing the actress, but rather the real life individual that she has turned into for this brief period on the silver screen. Moreover, it involves being in the role not merely for the length of the movie, but for the entire time the flick is in production. This is done because people want to reveal the truth, as much as possible. I have seen this in performances time and again when I feel that I’m watching not an actor, but Nixon or Malcolm X, even though both died years ago. Those on the screen are not unlike the writer who intends to show the truth, as much as possible, despite the limitations placed in the way.

*Wild Fire* is a 2006 novel by one of my favorite writers, Nelson DeMille. Just one word of warning: it might keep you up at night. Detective John Corey and his wife, FBI agent Kate Mayfield, try to determine how their good friend, Harry Muller, of the Federal Anti-Terrorist Task Force, died on a not-so-typical reconnaissance weekend in the Adirondacks. The bears weren’t his demise, and I don’t need to reveal the ending – you’ll have to read the book – but *Wild Fire* involves secret intelligence, nuclear adventures, which is another oxymoron, and unheard of evil. The reason I mention DeMille’s book is because of its connection to the subject matter of this book. One association has to do with the fact that no matter who they are and whom they are working for, spies just can’t be trusted.
At the same time, John and Kate somehow find out what really happened, and in this case the team does a fantastic job in unraveling why Harry didn’t survive his camping Columbus Day weekend in 2002. Their research and reasoning uncover the truth. One phrase that John utters has to do with not believing in conspiracies – did I mention that this was also what the novel was about? His comment doesn’t make sense since that’s what he and his better half have gotten themselves into. Another idea that strikes home is his excellent observation that if you want to commit murder and not be found out, ever, you really need to make sure the body is never found. Bain – not to be confused with Cain – Madox made good use of a wood chipper to disgustingly remove the body of the nuclear physicist Mikhail Putyov, but had his reasons for not doing the same with Harry. As I pointed out earlier, investigations and the internet make it impossible to hide a crime. Eventually the truth will surface.

Other connections to the truth found in the DeMille work are that power and greed create criminals and one begins to wonder who can be trusted. It’s hard to escape the truth that each of us has a dark side, but you can find some good in everyone. Madox confirmed the first premise and seems to be the exception to the second one. Though *Wild Fire* is a novel, it’s historical fiction – that’s the really scary part – but it has great insight, information and enough laughs to entice readers to pick up another book by DeMille.

I mentioned the fact that there is no such thing as the perfect crime and it’s difficult to hide the truth, but how do you reconcile the knowledge that there are so many unsolved
crimes? The answer can be found in *Wild Fire*, as John and Kate have no concern for the slow, get-nowhere procedures, as they bypass the bureaucracy. Had they followed the normal protocol, the book would have had a different ending, which I can’t reveal since it would give away the actual finish to the tale. More wrongdoing could be resolved if investigators worked differently, doing things right and with more insight. If you follow the clues and connect the dots, the answer will appear. This is not unlike our task in uncovering the truth and determining what’s a lie and what isn’t. We just have to work at it. When a perpetrator tries to cover up a crime, he may be leaving more clues because of his efforts, as exemplified by eighteen minutes of blank tape in the 1970s.

The truth is plain to see, if we only take the time and effort to search for it. In the past, fingerprints were a huge part of discovery, soon to be supplemented by the loads of information – in many cases too much – that can be seen on the internet. DNA doesn’t replace the fingerprint, but enhances what is already available for us. We need also to understand that truth and finding it is a very complex matter. We may never know the names of the people who fired the bullets that killed John F. Kennedy, but at this point it doesn’t make that much of a difference. Our search is only to know what factions were responsible, whether it was the CIA, FBI, a pro-Castro group, an anti-Castro group or someone else. It’s probably too late for justice as most of the assassins are long gone from this earth. Why even worry about the specifics?

The truth is available, but we have to search for it.
Possible sources are newspapers, magazines and books. The television can also provide some insight as can the internet and interviewing people. Letters, journals and memoirs can bring out who someone was and in what he may have been involved. Another option is going to the archives in libraries and reading past newspapers and documents. Using any of these has to be done with some apprehension because along with the truth comes the possibility of a few lies, which have to be filtered out.

On Sunday night, April 26, 2009, I watched a captivating, entertaining and insightful 2007 motion picture, *The Darjeeling Limited*. While viewing the special features on the DVD, I saw the preview for another 2007 movie that I figured I had to see, since it appeared to be concerned with the subject of this book. *Resurrecting The Champ* is a boxing movie that is about much more than that, concerning itself with the relationship of fathers and sons. Samuel L. Jackson is brilliant as he portrays the retired champ, Battlin’ Bob Satterfield. He convinces a young journalist Erik Kernan Jr., played by Josh Hartnett, about his past, even though it is somewhat of a fabrication. The champ was in reality another fighter of lesser fame, Tommy Kincaid. In his quest for fame as a writer, Erik fails in one aspect of his investigation – he doesn’t uncover the lie.

Deception is part of fathers’ agendas when they use them to gain respect and admiration from their sons. The film emphasizes that many of us don’t want to know the truth, which I commented on earlier in this book. Despite the scheming of Kincaid, it may call for some analysis because what he did is not without some merit. You’ll have to catch
the movie to understand what I’m talking about. The father and son relationship applies to Erik and his father, who deserted the writer at an early age. Erik’s dealings with his six-year old son, Teddy, are very similar, although not as extreme. There is also another father and son consideration between Kincaid and his offspring. The motion picture is also about forgiveness, since there are a few people in the movie who need it.

One thought that is brought out toward the end of the motion picture is that we should be ourselves – this is a great relief if we had considered modeling our lives on heroes such as Jeffrey Dahmer or Bernard Madoff – whether in our personal lives or with our business associates. This covers our treatment of family and friends. Resurrecting The Champ is about more than one person being brought out of the pit of self-destruction. It’s about the media and writers in particular. At the beginning of the movie as well as at the end, we can hear the wise words of Erik, the journalist. “A writer, like a boxer, must stand alone. The truth is revealed and there is nowhere to hide.”

I’ve mentioned many books and a few movies in this effort of mine. In each case, they fit in well with a chapter or two of the discussion. On Cinco de Mayo in 2009, I visited a cinema for the first time in many years. It’s not that I’m not a moviegoer, because I see numerous offerings on DVD and video. I don’t see an average of one a day – though there have been times when I’ve watched doubleheaders – but I certainly approach that number. The movie that I saw that day in May was State Of Play, which I highly recommend. In fact it’s your homework assignment to receive credit for
the course. Obviously, I’m kidding but this gem reflects much of what is in this book, touching on almost every chapter here. The main themes of the movie are conspiracy, uncovering the truth while losing your friends, and the role of the press struggling to meet a deadline. I always watch the credits after the movie concludes for various reasons, and for this film I noticed that there was mention of the fact that the work was fiction. Indeed much of what took place was a creation of Hollywood – the characters and the plot. What was not a lie was the premise, even though the name of the corporation involved had been changed. *State Of Play* is noteworthy because of all the truth within, especially the issue of journalists not revealing their sources. The 2008 movie, *Nothing But The Truth* almost begs to be included here, since it covers the same issue. Journalist Rachel Armstrong, brilliantly portrayed by Kate Beckinsale, refuses to out an individual she came in contact with and winds up incarcerated – and not just overnight – in order to protect the person who shared information with her for the paper. Any journalist who fails to keep the source hidden will play a major role in the media becoming insignificant in its purpose, and newspapers no longer a part of our lives, except for mundane matters. We must question what implications this has if Deep Throat isn’t honest. It is the job of each one of us to separate the lies from the truth. As I said, that task is simple, but it’s not easy.
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*author’s note – in truth, I can’t recommend all these books, since I haven’t read some of them*
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The Sound Of Music (1965)

State Of Play (2009)

Wilma (1977)

X (1992)
I Believe In Love (Mirror Mirror Mix) Written by Nina Hart, Sam Hollander, and Tarsem Singh Performed by Lily Collins Produced by Sam Hollander (as S*A*M) and Tarsem Singh (as Tarsem) Co-produced by Adam Pallin Music by Alan Menken (uncredited) See more Â». Frequently Asked Questions. This FAQ is empty.Â While this film seems to be perfectly tailored for some audiences, most discerning viewers will find Mirror Mirror to be lacking depth. Several plot fixtures are left