

Big Pink



By Vic Socotra

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By the Numbers

There actually was only one Karla, though she was a woman of many parts, and the reason I washed up at Big Pink. It is tempting to break her up into more, like the Mardys, of whom there are three, or were until Mardy One died.

The remaining Mardys moved up, which reflects the hierarchic ordering of the building. It was still confusing, since Mardy One still existed in the past, and we had to constantly qualify our references as being the Old Mardy One, rather than the newer incarnation.

It did not save a bit of time, or add any clarity.

Karla arced through my life like a comet, following an egg-shaped orbit around her sun that brought her by where I was every few decades. Her first passing shaped my course of action, which was to join the Navy and ship out as far as I could. I did not stop until I got to Africa, and that was the long way around.

Life being a series of sequential accidents, that set off a string of coincides that turned into a career of sorts, though one in which I found myself always a bit surprised, as though it was happening to someone else.

She appeared in the heavens again about a decade ago, her presence at first faint, but growing in luminosity. I should have got out of the way of her headlights, but I did not, transfixed like a deer in Up North Michigan.

So I suppose I could call it Karla One and Karla Two, but she would probably disagree with me. She would say that she is just going where she is going, and it is her contention that I am subject to periodic hallucinations. In any event, I will probably be dead before it is time for her to appear again.

In the future, though, I have resolved to keep things as simple as possible. Everyone keeps their assigned names, and in the case of duplicates, their numbers. Muhammed Three will always be the night security guy who sleeps in the conversion van in the parking lot.

Muhammed Two will remain the erudite former journalist from Karachi, who has no apparent fear, and Muhammed One will be that kid who loved the diving board that the management company made us rip out of the pool deck due to insurance costs.

He moved out the year after I got here, but he is the first, and though the first will be last I'm sure, it is just too complicated to keep changing everything around.

I'm pretty sure the Sarahs would agree.

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1964: Long Live the Queen

Big Changes Coming At Buckingham

Frances and Larry Kettell are in the office on the second floor office in the Buckingham Shopping Center. Kettell is the Overseer of the Buckingham plantation, and lives in the neat Cape Cod cottage on Glebe road, the only exception to the uniform blocks of garden apartments that are now complete over nearly 120 acres of prime Arlington real estate.

The low brown brick blocks stretch along Glebe Road from the office north to the field of wildflowers near the Ballston shopping area, and south to a verdant swath of woods that stand as a barrier to the noise of increasingly busy Route 50.

The County has aggressively widened the old two lane National Boulevard into a major east-west route heading for Fairfax City- a proto-expressway in segments near Arlington Hall, where the Defense Department had just announced the establishment of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

The last of the Georgian-styled garden apartments- Buckingham Village sections I-III- were finished a decade ago; the property south of Route 50 on the Four Mile Run had been developed as the Claremont area of modest single-family homes by Gerald, her only son.

The low-lying area of Claremont, the part on the hundred-year flood plain that could not be built on, had been donated to the County in exchange for the right to build the houses. The County graciously named the park for Allie, and would serve as the only public memorial to the man from New York who transformed the County into communal properties for workers of moderate means.

Gerald sensed the change in the preferences of the buying public. They wanted space, and they wanted privacy, and they wanted distance from the rising social pressures of the District. The last segregated high school in Fairfax- W.T.Woodson- is being constructed in Fairfax. The last black-only high school, Luther Jackson, is complete. Arlington County has announced its intention not to comply with Richmond's rejectionist position on the races.

Fairfax will resist integration.

Gerald would drop his children off at the office in Buckingham before continuing west on Route 50 to investigate the possibilities of vacant land outside the Beltway. He had his eye on the fields east of the Star Petroleum tank farm.

The kids would often ride with Frances in the big Caddy, and look out at her subjects in Buckingham. The last undeveloped parcels in the Freed Empire was the seven acre strip along Route 50 that served as a barrier against the increasing road noise, and the pie-shaped vacant lot between the churches on North 2nd Street.

A reporter from the Post was coming. John Willmann was a staff writer who specialized in the volatile Washington real estate beat. He was a thin man in a dark suit and white shirt. His glasses were thick black frames, and he wore a hat with a thin brim that he removed in respect as he walked up the stairs of the white brick building whose second floor is occupied by the headquarters of the Paramount Communities.

Willmann is onto something in the real estate market, seeing that something profound was in progress in the wake of the shooting of JFK in Dallas. There was an edgy electric feeling in the air, and it was reflected in cash and cars and houses. The suburbs were exploding in acres of new single-family homes. This is an opportunity to drum up interest in the other trend, the erection of apartment blocks similar to those in the District in close-in Arlington.

Frances agreed to speak to him in her capacity as Mrs. Allie S. Freed in her capacity as head of the Paramount Communities Corporation and several other commercial entities that own and control Buckingham.

The long black Caddie is downstairs. Driver Mickey is checking with his bookie on likely horses at Aqueduct on a pay phone near the florist.

Frances is gracious, and does a photo op for the reporter, pretending to gesture at a drawing with her veteran general manager, Lawrence F. Kettell.

"We are aware that the 1960s is the era of the high-rise apartment so we have started construction of an 8-story, 246-unit modern concrete-brick-and-glass building on our property at Arlington Blvd. and N. Pershing Drive."

"Let's face it. The land that my husband assembled nearly 30 years ago has increased in value as our Nation's Capital area has pushed out. Our garden buildings, most of them only 2-stories high, are occupying close-in land that might, conceivably, be sold for \$25 a square foot. We will complete the new Big Pink high-rise and then decide what comes next. I have hired Vlastimil Koubek to design it, and it is being built by H R H Construction.

"The Buckingham mortgage has been paid off and the next phase of our program may be to plan razing—before many years—some of the low, Georgian-styled buildings and replace them with a few towering structures that have elevator service and all those other extras that people seem to want these days. Our site is like an estate and it offers a park-like setting."

Kettell leaned forward, emphasizing his agreement. "We are keeping up with the times. We have modernized Buckingham, and updated the kitchens. Some are now on their fourth new refrigerator, three times as big as the original. Our occupancy rate is 99 percent, and our annual turnover only 15 percent. We paid \$250,000 for complete new wiring so the tenants can have their own air conditioners. Our maintenance staff keeps things in good condition. Let's face it: Buckingham is a great value. The rent for an efficiency starts at \$74 and ranges up to \$162 for our biggest unit, a three-bedroom duplex. That is only twice what it was when we opened the first units in 1938."

Frances smiled, serene. "I'm always meeting someone who tells me that he or she once lived here. One of our illustrious alumni is Milton Elsborg. He once lived in one of our 196 buildings. He also started his first Drug Fair store in our Buckingham shopping center. We have 27 stores, you know, including a theater."

"We have a vision for what Arlington needs. I have lived all my life at the Shoreham Hotel in the District, and that is the sort of elegance we would like to bring here. The owner, Bernie Bralove, is my friend and landlord." She smiled enigmatically.

"You see, we have been faithful to my late husband's dedication to provide moderately priced family rental housing. He was broken up by the unemployment and the breadlines of the 1930s. The automobile business was in the doldrums. But he was a man of vision and ideals. He decided that housing should be a major industry, and it could provide needed jobs and better living conditions. He talked about his plans with FDR, for whom he served as the director of the Committee for Economic Recovery and Social Progress."

"He had a vision of applying mass production techniques from the auto business to building. He found the property and put together the deals for the farms here. He got Henry Wright to design the campus. Hank was chair of the Columbia University School of Journalism. Allie got the project underway with Allen Kamstra and Al Lueders, Allen just passed away, bless him."

"We were not the very first FHA-approved rental housing project in this area, since Colonial Village beat us out by a few months due to the delays caused by my husband's passing. But our development was considered a model by the Federal Housing Administration. They sent such a succession of professional visitors that we became something of a school for housing. Eleanor Roosevelt was a great supporter and used to come here often. As you know, she asked me to serve on the board of governors for her Institute for Cancer Research."

"There are no thoroughfares in our project. Streets were designed to protect young children."

"We have always tried to keep people and automobiles separate on our campus. I gave my daughter the Cadillac that had been custom-built for my husband before his death. We drove that one right through the War and into the 1950s when we finished construction."

"Oh yes, we were talking about Buckingham and the Big Pink high-rise, weren't we? Well, you can say it will have a heated swimming pool for year-around use, a roof sun-deck and social rooms. And there will be good landscaping and open spaces, just like we have in the original Buckingham."

I shouldn't be doing this at my age—heavens, I turned down many opportunities on other projects. But this is Buckingham and we've got to keep up with the times, don't we?"

Nothing is Easy

I sometimes have a few drinks at the Café Asia on Wilson Blvd, down in Rosslyn. When it is warm, you can sit out on the sidewalk and watch the people trudge up the hill.

If it is too cold, you can sit inside where they sell sushi and alcohol in a very post-modern airy room with big glass windows and the wait staff is all from Asia. Some of the girls are right off the boat and some are second and third generation Americans, so it is very much an Arlington place with an Asian format. I practice my Thai, Japanese and Korean, or at least the phrases I remember that makes the ladies giggle.

I used to go there when I hung out with a younger crowd from Health and Human Services downtown. They would be just launching their Friday as I faded after a couple drinks. They would go on dinner and clubs afterward, since there was nothing but opportunity. They had the money, they had the energy and they knew where all the little places were all up and down the Boulevard.

I would go home to Big Pink and collapse.

To do so, I would drive up the bluff where the Civil War Fort used to be, passing the fire station and the strip mall on the right, where Ray's Steakhouse opened, and Pho 75 sells the best damn Vietnamese soup in great steaming bowls of it.

We used to go there from the Pentagon, in the days before Ray's arrived and the place was still a dump. We would sit under the pressed-tin roof amid the fake palms and talk about the war. "Pho" means hearty soup in Vietnamese and "75" was the year that the owner and his family stopped being the Finance Minister and became a refugee.

Further up the street is another Vietnamese place, a little more upscale owned by General Minh, late of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, which is a perfectly logical career move, given the circumstances.

Changing circumstances are the key to the vibrancy of Wilson Boulevard, and of course the Metro and immigration. It is so hot with activity that it sizzles. When I started out in the Navy Annex in the 1980s, there wasn't much happening in Arlington.

Or at least it didn't seem that way to the Commuter crowd, who bought homes way out where we could afford them and English was spoken in the schools. You could

see Arlington filling up with all sorts of people. The Vietnamese were the first wave, though of course something has to be pretty well along before a commuter notices anything.

Other waves included fugitives from unpleasantness elsewhere. Ethiopia and Eritrea, don't confuse them, and Pakistan and El Salvador and Guatemala.

The signs on the lawns in November encourage me to vote for people named "Khan" and "Pahlavi" for the House of Delegates, and everyone here is fine with it. Proud of it, in fact. And in the neighborhoods behind the strip malls are the old-timers in their little boxy houses from the fifties, regular Americans fading away and young people from all over pushing their way in, filling it up and bidding the prices to the moon.

If there is a recession it isn't happening around here. We are close in, we are on the Metro Orange Line. This is a place to be. Wilson Boulevard and its shadow Clarendon are constructed over the tunnels of the Orange Line.

The first stop coming out of the District in the Old Dominion is Rosslyn, an artificial town of tall glass towers. It used to be a frantic center of activity during the week that abruptly shut tight as a drum when the commuters left. There was stuff to do there during the day, but at night, forget about it.

Silent as a tomb in Arlington cemetery. May as well walk across the lovely arches of the Key Bridge to Georgetown for signs of life.

But that is all changed, and there is raucous life as you drive up the hill from the Potomac.

Wilson Boulevard is the polar opposite to Route 50, which is a broad, high-speed concrete ribbon as it approaches Big Pink.

Route 50 is a way to get somewhere else, California, even. Wilson is a place to live, and love.

The Boulevard has shed the skin of old Arlington, the little art deco low-rise buildings with the silver letters like old bus terminals. Now, the buildings are thrusting up to the sky and there are more places to live and have lunch that you can imagine. There are people everywhere, walking in the morning to the Metro to get downtown.

Further on toward home is the Barnes and Nobel, and a Pottery Barn and Fresh Foods and an Apple Store. From the Crate and Barrel it is crawling distance to the

legendary Whitlow's on Wilson, across from Faccia Luna. Half price burgers on Monday and half-price sandwiches on Tuesday at the former and excellent Italian-style pizza and pasta at the latter.

At Garfield and Wilson is the Mexicali Blues (they are Honduran) and the Wood Fired Grill and on the first floor of the Arlington Human Services Building is the Big Belly Deli and across the street is the Hard Times Café with both kinds of Chili, sweet and hot, and the Hot Shottes coffee house next-door. Down the cross street is that cute Indian place and two Vietnamese restaurants.

One of them is to die for, according to my sources, and the other may just kill you. I don't know the difference and won't try to find out. The Clarendon Grill and the Greek place are on the same lot as Gold's Gym, and Harry's Tap Room is new and chic. The new Cheesecake Factory with the onion-shaped dome is opening up right in the middle of it. Mr. Day's Sports Bar is a couple blocks up, on the ground floor of the iconic building at Clarendon, which everyone pretends is just another office complex. I have never been in there during working hours. I swear.

There is much more at the next stop on the Metro at Ballston, which is the gate to the Buckingham Neighborhood.

There is nothing beyond that. Wilson Boulevard turns toward Fairfax County, where the boundary stone marks the end of the old District and the beginning of real Virginia. They built so fast out in Fairfax that anything interesting was bulldozed immediately in the interest of progress.

If you can't get it here in Arlington, I don't think it is worth getting. As far as I'm concerned, the Fairfax County line marks the end of the known earth.

They used to hang prisoners in the square by the Courthouse, and if the buildings are taller now, they still serve the same metaphoric functions. There is a cluster of fine places to dine that cater to the practitioners of the legal trade at the Courthouse and County Jail. Ireland's Four Courts bar is there, and a perfectly serviceable diner called Summer's.

It is a pivotal restaurant in the history of Arlington, at least my part of it, since I was encouraged to meet with a counselor there to talk about my marriage. I don't like to talk about misery, but the Ex insisted, and I had learned from long experience to at least pretend to do what she said. The alternatives were always unpleasant.

The psychologist was a staff counselor at the time, on his lunch break from the towering County Jail across the street.

He used to be a Navy carrier pilot and a risk-taker. We ordered off the menu and he told me about a patient who had multiple personalities, and how difficult it was to keep things straight. I agreed with him. I think it was a patty melt, for me. Good quality beef, well done, and the sautéed onions were deliciously caramelized. When the lunch was over, I contemplated the way the American cheese slice had melted down around the edge of the sandwich, leaving the outline of something that was gone.

I picked up the tab, since the advice was free, and worth every penny of it. He recommended I cut my losses and get a divorce.

He did not bother to mention how deep the losses would be, or how dark the night.

I saw him a year or so later, over a beer, and remarked on it. He smiled thinly, and said he hadn't said it was going to be *easy*.

Winter 2002

TV Weatherman Bob Ryan was right. This is going to be a nasty, messy winter. It is raining cold and hard on the Buckingham Neighborhood, and coating the pavement and the once-white frozen drifts left over from last week. It is dark, of course, and later it promises to be a reprise of yesterday's raw gray bluster, adding only a penetrating damp chill. I hate it when Bob is right, and we aren't even to the end of December yet.

That is what I gathered from the battlements of the 5th floor balcony of Big Pink. Inside, the BBC reported that the Spanish had discovered North Korean Scud missiles on a freighter bound for Yemen. The captain said his ship was carrying cement. It was. And more.

This is adding to the tension in South Korea, where the riots continue, and Deputy Secretary of State Dick Armitage is in Beijing to try to manage the affair through daddy-rabbit China. I like Dick. He had an in-country tour in Vietnam after the Naval Academy with John McCain. He got out, sensible fellow, and has a connection to Arlington through some ancient scandal associated with people he helped to escape to liberty. He doesn't seem embarrassed about it in the slightest.

He is the only State official I can recall that looks like he could break you in both hands. I think that is a good thing in a diplomat, managed properly. Bob Edwards, the other of my critical morning Bobs, tells me there are 70 weapons inspectors in Iraq now, a nation the size of Texas.

He also mentioned that Jimmy Carter accepted his Nobel Prize, linking it to the continuing crisis in Iraq, but ever the iconoclast, said that armed force was not always bad. Meanwhile, Caracas Venezuela is abuzz with people marching, beating pots and pans as protest against the government of President Hugo Chavez. Oil is weak, the economy failing.

Chavez champions the poor, and the middle class is rising against him. So East and West, North and South the din is rising.

The local commentators are babbling gently about the CIA and FBI and the establishment of the new Undersecretary of Intelligence in DoD. Intelligence failure and the Kissinger Panel are the topics de jour, with missiles in the background, missile sure to be used for something awful, just a matter of time before they come here, say the talking heads, but will we lose our liberty before? The growing intrusion at the airports is cloying, and I feel like the terrorists have stolen something precious.

I remember when there was no security at the airports, and on my first flight on a DC-3, Mom walked the little ones from the gate at the terminal to the rolling stairs at the back of the airplane.

I have lost my liberty to the lawyers. They are still tugging at the carcass of Socotra v. Socotra, government worker and spouse, known better in Fairfax Chancery Court as file 157889. Amid the bitterness and bile, I find my only ally is my almost-ex, who does not want any more \$100 letters from her rapacious lawyer. My rapacious attorney is much more reasonable. Her letters only cost \$75.

I am so far in the hole that I cannot see the upper limit of it, and this little postage stamp apartment in Big Pink is the only comfort I can take. The view across Route 50 is commanding, looking out over the trees and the Unitarian Church on the other side of the concrete gully.

It is rented and the door to the balcony is sprung on its frame. The wind scours this side of the building, rushing from west to east with urgency caused by the massive bulk. It claws at the edge of the door, which opens toward the District, and hurls it open like a sail with sudden gusts. There are only so many times it can crash open like that.

Based on the ghosts of old hardware mountings on the frame, it is not the first door to fit that frame.

Meanwhile, the rain comes down and the government goes on, though the treacherous roads are stopping life in its tracks. Schools across the region are closing. Big Pink is literally on the edge of the fall line of the watershed, the last highland before the rivulets drop sharply down Lubber Run to the Four Mile stream that courses nearly at sea level into the Potomac.

Fairfax County sprawls westward from the edge of Arlington County to the foot of the Blue Ridge, so the western part of the school district is literally in a different climatic zone. The radio reports spin-outs and wrecks all across the metro region, and I suppose I am going to take the back-roads up to Langley to avoid the mad Virginians and their motorcars.

The mail was late when I trudged in from the parking lot. It was dark, of course, and had been dark since a little after four.

Dark in the morning, dark at night, dank and chill. No wonder they invented the holidays to distract us.

There were some invitations in the mail, and some from the other people on the Fifth Floor, who are very nice. I don't know how they fetched up in this building, but there are only so many variations on the theme of misery.

It is an odd day and I need to work. An ominously large package had arrived from my pal Snidely Whiplash down south. He had major surgery earlier this year, the real kind, not the metaphor, and I think the gift I sent him is inadequate.

The almost ex is dragooning the kids out of town for The Day, just as she has hijacked all the holidays since we split up, part of a campaign for justice in the world. So the wind is a bit out of the sails on the whole holiday spirit thing. I feel like the weather this morning, cold and grim.

I checked the OPM Home Page on the computer, a new feature for government workers, to see if they had granted late arrival this morning. They hadn't. Everyone was supposed to be on time, critical and non-critical employees alike.

The metro area is a mess, and I am thankful that Big Pink is in the middle of everything.

Squish

I was in 515 when the convector failed. I had a fondness for that unit, since it faced south to Route 50, and no one could see in my windows. I could do anything I wanted in that unit. It also had a balcony from which I could direct the motion of the heavens, and watch the traffic and the trees across the big road that dance in the breeze.

It was pure happenstance that this unit had come available just at the time my lease was terminated on the second floor. The owner was a nice young lady who had started out with this place and gone on to real estate, considering it a career with a real future.

She made a ton of money on it, since I don't think she paid more than \$55,000 for it, and it was now worth at least twice that. It made me a little nervous to rent again, but I had no choice, and really was just grateful I did not have to haul my crap across town somewhere.

I didn't have the time or money for it, and this move was accomplished with the Big Pink shopping cart.

The DC snipers whizzed below my balcony, and I do not know if I saw them in their flight from the murder they committed at the Home Depot up the road by Seven Corners.

It was small, of course. It was the model they called the "junior one bedroom," which is real-estate talk for putting a wall down the middle of an efficiency unit, installing a pocket door, and calling it a bedroom.

For the uninitiated, a "convector" is a unit through which hot water is pumped from the bowels of Big Pink in the winter months, and chill water in the summer. A thermostat registers the external temperature and trips a fan that blows air over the coils within, producing heat or cold. Despite the construction of the wall, nothing else had been touched. The convector's interior coils had been quietly rusting for fifty years, and the drip pan that caught the condensation from them was slowly losing it's ability to function.

Squish.

Water flowed from the sides of the little Oriental rug I have by the balcony door. It pooled on the top like a sponge. I shifted my feet. Squish. This was not good, I thought. The water was supposed to stay outside and this was the fifth floor. I

hoped the water had not risen this far from the parking lot, global warming notwithstanding. The sheen of water began at the edge of the convector and stopped at the edge of my large stack of oriental carpets.

I was determined that I would someday be able to live again in something more than this, and when I discovered that the Persians next to the Home Depot were going out of business, I began to use credit to buy carpets at rock bottom prices.

I knew they were good. I had just been to Delhi, and bargained vigorously. I was paying the same price here as there, and it made the rugs almost an addiction.

There were about seven rugs of varying dimension on the floor, almost exactly as they were stacked at the showroom.

Squish.

I realized with growing horror was acting as a wick, sucking the water through the millions of hand knots toward the back of my easy chair. It had probably been coming after me for days and I didn't know it.

There was water *everywhere*.

When I had exhausted the battery of towels I found a large trash bag and stepped out onto the balcony to gather them up and lug them down to the laundry room for drying. They showed evidence of crimson dye, which meant the colors were bleeding from the hand-knotted rugs.

Then I broke out the fans and opened the windows. I trained the airflow on the rugs, trying to jam articles of furniture between the layers while the dryer cycled. It was still raining and the air was as moist without as within. When the towels were dry, I repeated the process, wishing there was someone to bring coffee and sandwiches. I peeled more of the thick layers back, adding more objects so the moist air could circulate around the tops and bottom.

I kept at it until the flooding was under control and finally secured from General Quarters. Regrettably, there was no place to sit, and no real place to walk, since the floor now undulated steeply with the furniture below. It was a difficult time to live in 515, and I don't think it ever really did dry out for the next few months I was there.

All the dye sort of ruined the landlord's beige wall-to-wall carpet at the bottom, but she was nice. She only took half my damage deposit, though I think she might have considered that it was her fault the convector failed.

If not her fault, it certainly was her liability, you know?

The Rules

Policy is formed in Washington, and when the Speaker lived here, it was even made in Big Pink. Mrs. Hitler is hell on wheels about the rules, which are the only things separating us from savagery, or the renters.

We have come down a little in the wide world, and the most important thing we worry about is the failing of the hot water pipes that periodically flood the building, which is bad.

We still interact with the wider city, since many of us venture out in the day to deal with it.

The capital is our context, and contextually, we have rules that are operative in all democracies, but in mostly dilute form. Here they are concentrated by the amount of money and power to be distributed. Of course, playing by the rules may contribute to the lessening of the pool of resources to be divided.

But of course, the underlying principle is that you can bury the dead in the future, in some other budget cycle, and no one will ever know who was responsible for the mess when it comes. The President is doing that about the war; he will stay the course and make it someone else's problem.

Don Rumsfeld, a man of cerebral and serene self-confidence, came back to Washington with his own set of rules about how to operate in the White House. He published them with some fanfare as he set about making the most profound changes to the Pentagon since the other famous Secretary, Robert Strange McNamara.

Some insiders say that the effects of what Mr. Rumsfeld did will be as long-lasting as the ones that McNamara imposed- the ones that came within a whisker of driving the Ford Motor Company out of business. Here are the rules we follow here, as we speed toward the abyss in our shiny cars:

If it's worth fighting for, it's worth fighting dirty for.

Don't lie, cheat or steal...unnecessarily.

There is always one more son of a bitch than you counted on.

An honest answer can get you into a lot of trouble.

Sound bites rule.

The more you run over a dead cat, the flatter it gets.

You can always kick the can down the road.

The facts, although interesting, are irrelevant.

Chicken Little only has to be right once.

There is no such thing as a final decision.

"NO" is an interim response.

You can't kill a bad idea.

If at first you don't succeed, destroy all evidence that you ever tried.

The truth is a variable.

The bad guys don't always win, but think hard when *you* do.

A porcupine with his quills down is just another fat rodent.

The only way to find out if you can trust someone is to travel with him to someplace awful.

Agree with any concept or notional future option in principle, but fight implementation every step of the way.

A promise is not a guarantee.

If you have to explain it in The Post, you already lost.

Standards of Ethics: If you want it, you can't have it. If it tastes good, spit it out.

If you can't counter the argument, leave the meeting.

Never underestimate the power of an unsigned memorandum.

A pretty baby has many parents; an ugly baby is a bastard.

We are all contractors, sooner or later. Be nice.

Want a friend in Washington? *Get a dog.*

Pool Party, 2003

It did not rain that weekend, I was still new to Big Pink, and I had the sunburn to prove it. Melanoma be damned.

There was a new administration here at the building, drawn from a broad-based coalition of owners. Renters have to go along with whatever comes up, so I was alert for change.

I had been in the building for over a year, and I was starting to feel like the place was home.

There is a new Community Manager, too, the Mayor of Big Pink.

He is drawn from the retired Marine Community, replacing Frank, the retired cop. Privately, I applauded the Board for its commitment to a muscular approach to shared living. In order to commemorate the establishment of the new regime, an old tradition was renewed.

The conversion of this great old pile of pink brick from apartment to individual ownership is about as old as the Baathist government in Iraq. They used to have pool parties in the elegant facility tucked under the northwest flank of the eight-story edifice, and the newly installed entertainment committee decided to try to renew the tradition.

I had run out of chores to do, or rather got to that part of the list that required more energy than I had remaining on Saturday. The sun was out and I surrendered to its enticement.

I went down to the pool deck around 3:30PM with my towel, cigarettes, lighter, transistor radio and earphones. I made sure I had the earphones; I had been lectured sternly about that requirement the year before, my first poolside season. As a renter, Mrs. Hitler was deeply suspicious of me.

The party was to start at 4:00, so there was a lot of set-up activity in progress. There was a one-man band and a buffet contracted from the Red Hot & Blue barbecue. There were still places available and I took station under the umbrella furthest from the entrance.

I was minding my own business, listening to some old disco on the PA system the band-man had set up and tapping my foot to some Hall & Oates when I was attacked by the Finns.

Or by one Finn, anyway. Marianne is a vivacious woman with a heroic bosom and I was apprised that this was *her* table. She was far too polite to actually ask me to leave, and instead simply included me as a part of her entourage.

Promptly at four they opened the buffet and a crowd of the older residents showed up for an exceptionally early Early Bird dining opportunity.

I was soon surrounded by residents who outranked me by a quarter century. Included in the party by virtue of my position, I closed the book and made conversation. Marianne is of the life-of-the-party school. Her husband is Ari, a more taciturn version of the breed.

Angular cheekbones and sky-blue eyes. types, a sauna-type Finn.

The band was joined by a stout resident with a Stratocaster guitar and an attractive older woman who had a bit of a lounge routine.

The music was popular and loud and there was free wine and I surrendered to it, singing along with Marianne. The crowd surged, attracted by the free food and drink.

I was interested by the composition of building. This is a place of transition. There is the geriatric component, some on walkers. Big Pink is clearly the last stop before assisted living for some, the answer to the struggle to maintain a single family home.

There are many women in this category, and a few angular men whose trousers are gathered at the waist. And Jack, of course. He is the King of the pool, a dapper old man who is a dead ringer for the Millionaire on the "Chance" cards in the Monopoly Board game.

All the women love him, and he knows everything that happens here. Just ask.

There is the legion of the divorced. Middle-aged men and women who are starting over after something else. The men have a certain rakish charm and the women have an air of uncertain optimism for which they certainly should know better.

I am one of that cohort, of course, so I feel a kinship.

Then there are the political or lobbying groups, people that are here because of the town and the access to the levers of power. A low-maintenance pied a terre in the imperial city is useful.

Marianne nudged me, saying one handsome one square-jawed individual was the president of the Industrial Brotherhood of Concrete Workers International. I whistled. That union was known in the past to determine succession to its Presidency just like ancient Rome.

And there was something else going on. A recent cover of Newsweek had featured a picture two very attractive women named Lauren and Liz who were described as "life partners." The interior story talked about the prospect of Gay Marriage, and there was a discussion of why the magazine chose to picture Lauren and Liz, rather than Tom and Ed.

From what I could see at the pool, the institution is already here and we ought to just get over it. There was a cute couple, hosting two daughters from the blonde's marriage. He had a small diamond stud and looked like the Arnie character from LA Law.

They were clearly a family, the four of them, and I realized a significant component of my building is gay and committed and wrapped in mortgages. Maybe society ought to just get over it.

And of course there were the twenty-somethings, the young professionals just starting out. The girls in their small suits and the boys who still get a kick out of doing cannon-balls off the diving board. They are more diverse than the older residents, who are almost exclusively white.

I saw Osama. He was having a beer in a big red plastic cup and seems to be doing well.

Not *that* Osama. I'm talking about the son of the Jordanian Army Attache who is renting a unit on the eighth floor, all the way at the top. He graduated from The Citadel down in South Carolina and is finishing up his Masters of Electrical Engineering at Georgetown. He plays the goof around the building, and particularly on the pool deck.

The Citadel is where Pat Conroy set his novel "The Lords of Discipline." My eyes widened in surprise. "Charleston, SC, is a long way from Amman, Jordan." I said.

"When I am at Big Pink," he said, sipping his beer, "I do not have to be serious. When I am out in the world I treat it as a matter of importance." He struck a grave pose. Then he laughed.

Osama is no fool. He has flashing dark eyes and a brilliant smile and short black hair cut in an almost military crop. He made gentle fun of the older crowd at the pool, scarfing down an early dinner, and mocking the enthusiasm for the trio that was playing 1950s dance music.

I considered was that it really was Osama who lived here on a short-term lease. Maybe it was the real guy hiding out somewhere upstairs in a darkened apartment, recording garbled incendiary messages on a cassette deck and mailing them from the Buckingham Post Office during the day when most people are at work. It seemed as likely as any other place to be hiding.

"So what a time in history to be named Osama," I said.

He shrugged. "It is the name my mother and father gave me," he said. "I could have changed my name. A lot of people did."

"What does it mean?" I asked.

He looked at me solemnly. "It means young lion in Arabic."

"Wow," I said. "It's funny that hasn't come up in all the talk about terrorism. What is an old lion?"

"Assad means lion, like Hafez Assad, the strongman of Syria. And it has come up and it does all the time," he said. "You just don't listen to the right media."

I agreed with him. I said we needed more Arabic speakers and we needed some more communication.

"Yeah, I talk to people back home and I tell them they have the Americans all wrong. They don't want to turn Iraq into a Christian country. They don't even want to turn America into a Christian country. They need to understand they way it really is here."

We talked about the Hashemite Kingdom, and the years he had spent in London and the Netherlands and ten years in the States. He was twenty-three and he had spent the majority of his life as an American, and was a graduate of one of the toughest southern military schools. His sister had been born at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, while his Dad did the short course at Army War College. He was thinking about going back to Amman to visit him. He had retired and was teaching at the Jordanian War College.

"Is it going to be hard to get back here if you go home?" I asked. I thought about a kid I grew up with whose father returned to Canada and lost his green card at the border one day, thrown out of the only country he had ever known. It is a cold world out there, and measurably more frigid since 9-11 for non-citizens.

"Everything is hard these days," he said. "I will need someone to sponsor me, probably."

"Well, you can use me if you want," I said. "I would hate for the States to lose someone like you."

He took a sip of beer and thanked me before swimming away to rejoin the younger crowd again.

Some Hispanic kids drifted up the fence, looking in. They are from the projects of whatever those low brick buildings are over across the parking lot. I asked, and someone told me it was part of the Buckingham neighborhood, which is real old.

No one chased them off, and they couldn't climb the fence, anyway. People were having so much fun that one of the residents hired the band to keep playing an extra hour and the languid American life-guard didn't even get mad when there were still residents in the pool at nine, when he should have been done and locking up.

I left I got into a discussion with Ari, about how he and his wife had fetched up here at Big Pink. He smiled a thin smile as his wife did The Peppermint Twist with another lady of a certain age. He told me the journey went through the loss of the Karelian District of Finland to the Soviets after fierce fighting that startled the Kremlin. The treaty of 1944 that ended that part of the war slammed down a fence of iron over the village where he lived.

It preserved the independence of his homeland, even if it meant the loss of his home.

I raised my eyebrows. He said it was a good thing that we beat the Russians, finally. He expects someday he would be able to go back. In the meantime, he said, lips thin, Big Pink is a fine place to live.

The kids were getting a good buzz on, dancing like crazy.

Youth is wonderful. Marianne got me to dance a few times, and presently I found myself doing the Elmer Fudd version of the Pointer Sister's hit "Fire" with the lounge singer before one of the intermissions:

"I'm dwivin' in my caaar, turn on the wadio....."

Life of the party, that's me. When you are starting over, you may as well have a good time.

Salvador is Missing

Rain, thank God. The earth smells rich this morning.

It is the first rain in weeks, and maybe the draught may be starting to break. It has killed the grass, and it is doing no good for the trees of the County. At least we have no howling dry wind as they have had in San Diego County. If we did, and there was a spark, the county would go up like tinder.

There must be a reason I washed up here, and not back in the town by the Bay I loved so much when I lived there.

Arlington County, Virginia, is known as the County of Trees. We are proud of the greenery, since we occupy one of the smallest and most densely populated counties in the country. By right, we should never have been an entity created this small. A few little towns would have sufficed in the Goliath of Fairfax County, but that is not how it worked out. We are a political accident, but the new chain link fence that has gone up around the garden apartments just across the road is no accident.

Someone has kidnapped all the Salvadorans, or they have fled in their old imported pickup trucks, no moving vans required. A chain link fence surrounds Little Salvador, which is also known in tax records as Buckingham Village I, II and III.

The Salvadorans and other immigrants, legal and not, have been packed into the Village for years. The smells are of central America, as you walk along, charcoal pollo on the grills in the common areas, and the smell of fried plantains drifting out of the open windows.

I have got a moderate case of the NIMBYs. Not enough to have me on the street, though if I had known about what they were planning I might have been.

“Not in my backyard,” is what the acronym means, and it refers to the all-American practice of opposing the legal exercise of other people's property rights if you don't happen to like what they are doing.

I am pretty sure I didn't like what was going on across Big Pink's back yard, but at the time I had little money, and the Spanish enclave kept mostly to itself. I moved in long after the Salvadorans had replaced the earnest Federal workers who were the first in the big blocks of garden apartments to the east. The complexes had become shabby, where they had not been converted to condominiums and given the residents a stake in their appearance.

If there were more people packed into the small apartments than was usual, that seemed to be their business. If their lives were spent more outdoors as a consequence, they were there before I was. If auto repair was a curbside neighborhood activity, so be it.

Like the issue of women in combat, it was a done deal, something that happened off the main stage when no one was looking.

Suddenly, the chain link fence was up and there was no one on the inside. The windows gaped empty, like accusing eyes and the doors stood open.

All the meetings have been held and the residents told to move. If we heard about it in Big Pink, we probably didn't understand, since the evictions were delivered in Spanish. When they went, they went after work in their trucks, no moving vans required.

Every parcel of land under the green leaves has been developed. For anything new, something old has got to go.

There are just about 200,000 of us, packed into the western diamond that remains of the original District of Columbia, which was returned by a weary Federal Government to the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1846. I don't know what would have happened had it stayed as part of the Federal Enclave; as part of an enemy state it was devastated during the Civil War, and ditches and earthen defense works still remain from the conflict, if you know where to look for them.

Arlington is comprised of about twenty-six square miles, and you can see the edges of it, if you go out on the balcony of one of the upper floors of Big Pink. The high-rise developments parallel Route 7, the Leesburg Pike, and the western point of the diamond is in a little park just beyond the green water tower that thrusts up above the trees.

There is never going to be another Big Pink, which towers eight floors above the foliage, anchoring the south end of the Buckingham historic neighborhood. That is not to say that they have quit throwing up great towers in the County, but the Master Plan is restricting them to the narrow corridor along the Orange Line of the Metro.

Big Pink gets a grandfather clause on that, being the legacy of the last of the first, the legendary Allie Sheed's wife Frances. She took over the land development when he died, and it was under her stern gaze that the garden apartments that became Little Salvador were built, and the rosy brick of our building selected. We are the last island in the trees away from the high-density corridor.

But of course the Salvadorans and the Guatemalans are gone, much more suddenly than when they arrived.

The question is not even where they went, since I have a pretty good idea. Out West, in Fairfax and Eastern Loudoun County, where great sprawling blocks of town-homes are rising incongruously out of the pastures.

I stumbled on the Master Plan yesterday. It was approved months ago, and there is not a damn thing we can do about it except watch them build. The question is about what- and who- is coming next.

Sex in the City

It is smack on six o'clock in the morning on the first week back at work. I am up early and bushy-tailed in preparation for a stultifying monthly meeting at the Facility. The radio says the Army is going to offer a \$10,000 for troops to sign on for another tour in Iraq.

I did some quick calculations. It had better be a **tax-free** ten grand. My great-great grandfather was offered \$650 to re-up for a second hitch in the Union Army in 1864. The Army threw in a thirty-day home leave as an added incentive. Young James was a sensible Irish lad with bright blue eyes and a mop of golden hair. He had done three years, part of it in the lines below Vicksburg. He took a good-faith down-payment on the bonus and went home and stayed there.

I think if you did the math in constant dollars, allowing for a century-and-a-half of inflation, he got a better offer than what the Army is offering today.

I did come lingering dishes and made the coffee rich and strong. In lingered over the e-mail. There was some promising technology regarding terahertz radiation (somewhere between microwave and Infrared) to penetrate tissue and solid materials but is not ionizing. It therefore is less harmful to living systems, and may be good for penetrating wood and metals.

I thought about posting the note back to the intelligence guys on my work-list who are obsessing about body cavities and didn't. People do obsess about the oddest things.

New Mardy One told me about another obsession over the weekend. She invited me to a Sex in the City party. It is a sometimes-regular occurrence, this one commemorating the fact that there are only seven more episodes remaining in the made-for-HBO series. Then it is over. No more Sarah Jessica Parker adventures in modern love and living in New York.

Watching the show en masse is apparently a social vehicle favored by one of the major market demographics. The newspaper even prints lists of trivia questions to help frame the mood. Times being what they are, Sex on the TV is better than what is happening at Big Pink, and at least everyone gets to talk about it.

I told her to count on me coming, and I would bring something. I was

carrying a load of stuff from the upstairs to the downstairs.

I am slowly moving the apartment and hoping to avoid the pandemonium that came when my first Big Pink landlord gave me the boot fourteen months ago. I had a one-year lease, and the terms went to month-to-month after that. I was happy enough there on the second floor, easy walk up, but I got a call at the office that said my occupancy was terminated.

I had a month to scramble and miraculously a place came open on the fifth floor just when I needed safe haven.

The landlord showed up the day I was supposed to be out and I wasn't, for the excellent reason that the painters in the new apartment were not quite finished. Matter of hours, they assured me in Spanish.

Buffy- that was her name- wore a wig every time I saw her. Her skin was unlined but had an eerie translucent quality that enabled me to see veins below the surface.

She had entered into this change of life through the abrupt loss of her husband. He got an infection of some sort, strep, probably, and it erupted and killed him. She was nice enough in person but I could hear her screaming in the hall at her maid about my failure to vacate the premises.

The painters were just pulling up the drop cloths, and I really needed to clear out. So it was not one of my best-organized decampments.

I'm slow on the uptake sometimes, but I figured out over a few weeks that she was the evil step-mother to two ungrateful daughters, since they promptly put the marital dwelling up for sale. I couldn't figure that one out, why he hadn't left it to her at least for the duration of her health, but all situations are different. Hearing her scream vituperation about me down the hall made me sympathetic to the evil step-daughters.

Anyhow, Buffy's closet guy and phone guy and some other assorted construction types were already measuring things as I was throwing the contents of my refrigerator into a shopping cart. The salad-dressing was going with the dress shirts, shoes matched and un-matched, and I was wheeling it down the hall from 202 to the elevator bank and taking the next available car to the fifth floor. I hurtled back and forth that morning, closet to shopping cart, cart to elevator, elevator to new place, closet again.

I did not see a lot of stuff in the new unit until I began to peel back the

sedimentary layers in preparation for my third move in two years.

The second place in Big Pink was on the 5th Floor, directly across from the elevators. There was a definite cultural change associated with the move. I had no idea that my new floor was populated with some of the most noted of Big Pink's eccentrics. I did know that I was now an elevator person, dependent on getting up the ten half-flight stairs by the miracle of the Otis Corporation. I get people trying their keys in my door when they get off at the wrong floor.

I understand the problem and have done it myself. The muted light in the hallways can have a disorienting sameness. The walls are rich beige in color with crown molding that covers the cable TV runs, the carpet is suitably dark and the big botanical prints in their golden frames all look the same.

I was staring at the ceiling fan I had just installed in the unit I bought on the ground floor. This change is another mixed blessing. Any change is as good as a vacation, they say, and I am convinced that you can never lose money in Arlington real estate, even in the condo market. Big Pink is a grand building with nice people, plenty of free parking and a lovely park-like setting. The new places they are throwing up (and I mean that in the nicest possible way) are cheaply constructed and you have to park in a crowded basement garage or take your chances on the street.

Big Pink is built solid, to the custom standards of an exacting owner. Once you get inside, the units are almost soundproof. I just bought the closest unit to the pool, and can literally hop from my patio to the lifeguard's station. The patio nearly doubles the size of the space available to me. I can sit out there with a table and one of those big umbrellas and tiki-torches like the Ironworkers executives on either side of me have. I could put in a hot tub, or anything you can do with nearly a hundred square feet of concrete.

I'm not sure if the hot tub next door is in accordance with the Association rules, but no one seems to mess with the Ironworkers. And there is no lawn to cut, and no one can throw me based on the designs of evil step-daughters, or for smoking in the house, or for having a pet or anything else landlords stick in the lease.

But there is also a downside to living on the first floor. Jack lives down by the pool in the summer, and he considers it his right to smoke his big cigars on any of the patios down here. In exchange he waters the plants

and sweeps up. At least he claims to.

It was seventy degrees that day, very odd for early January. I had put the finishing touches on the ceiling fan and was about to turn it on to see if I had all the wires correctly spooled together. I contemplated my handiwork. I probably should have used the close-to-the ceiling mode of installation, I thought. It seemed like 97" was plenty of head-room. And the think was controlled by a remote.

There were no pull chains like God had intended to have on lights and fans. I think it was in scripture, and probably in the New Testament. I could wind up not being able to turn on the light if the battery in the controller went dead.

"Can't have that!" I mumbled to myself. And what's more, the remote controller didn't seem to manage the fan-off, light-on thing at all well. When the fan was not moving the lights flickered in just the right frequency to bring on epilepsy. So there I was, thinking that just what I needed was another remote control to go with the one to the TV, the Cable box, the DVD and the TiVo.

I was filled with the elation of accomplishing something with the potential to burn down the building and the grim realization that I should get back up on the chair, disassemble the fan and put it back in the box to trundle back to the Home Depot and stand in line to return it.

I had the back door open just like I do up on the balcony on the 5th floor. Of course, since the hurricane last summer I can't do anything but leave the door open at least ajar. The claws of the wind had torn it open with such urgency that the hinges bent and it will no longer close on the frame. The best I can do is slam it real hard and hope it jams shut most of the way.

But since I am always coming and going to smoke and daydream and watch the traffic on Route 50 it is normally open. I went to the kitchen in the new unit to get something, and realized the door was wide open and anyone could just walk right in. I heard voices. I suddenly realized that I was accessible again. Up on my balcony I had an inviolate aerie.

No one with the exception of the process server sent by my ex-wife and the pizza man had ever knocked at my door.

Now I could emerge from the kitchen or bathroom and discover Jack sitting

in my armchair smoking a big cigar, or a homeless man pulling down the Murphy bed looking for a nice nap.

I made a mental note to get some liability coverage in case one of them bumps their head on the ceiling fan.

When I got back to the fifth floor I thought that I needed to figure out something to take to the party. I put some more stuff from the closet into a box.

Another banner day. I found a jar of last year's salad dressing in one of my hiking boots. It was still sealed. Maybe I could work it into a nice dip.

The Murphy Bed

So I wasted the day waiting for my bed to get here. It was very Thurber-esque. I thought about the memorable opening line: "I suppose that the high-water mark of my youth in Columbus, Ohio, was the night the bed fell on my father."

We had to read the Thurber story as part of the Norton Anthology in seventh grade introduction to Literature. The celebrated humorist re-created a raucous night of cascading hilarity from his youth. It involved a bed, of course, but that was only the plot mechanism. My bed was coming not from Ohio, but from Florida on a truck, via the terminal at Manassas Junction where Jackson stuck it to the Union Army and made them run all the way back to the lines near Big Pink.

They told me it would arrive from the warehouse sometime between eight and noon. I dutifully took my shower and got ready for work at the appointed hour and began to wait. Since I am moving from the rental on the Fifth Floor to the owner-occupied unit on the First floor, adjacent to the pool, there was plenty to occupy me. I shoveled some books and papers around, always surprised by what comes to the surface.

The bed I was waiting for would have fit in the Thurber story. I currently divide my paycheck between my ex and two prestigious land-grant colleges in the Middle West, well north of Columbus. I don't mind. But the consequence is that I am temporarily a man of limited means.

Accordingly, the little condo I was able to purchase here in Big Pink is limited to a single room, large kitchen, and on the delivery of a Murphy bed, a classic piece of Americana. The technology is simple and ingenious, the way things used to be when we lived in a mechanical age and nothing was solid-state.

If I put a conventional bed in the place it would be exactly like living in a Holiday Inn. Awkward to entertain.

"Hi! Welcome to the place, here is my bed, how do you like me so far?"

There is an alternative, of course. I could put in a fold-out couch and it would be just like the stateroom back on the aircraft carrier. Which is certainly a way to live, and I have done my years of that. But in my experience the mattresses the fold are awful and I am too old not to have a nice firm rational mattress. So I looked to another way to solve the problem.

The patented Murphy System seemed to meet my requirements. The key is that the

bed contains a real mattress that is mounted to the wall on a clever pivot. You can lift it up at the foot with a single finger and it smoothly glides up in an arc flat against the wall. The I ordered comes in rich genuine melamine and features bookcases that slide closed to completely conceal the mattress and make it seem that my sitting room is just that. I will also have some place to put the books so I can look at them. So it was Victorian technology to the rescue and that is exactly where my experience began to diverge from the quaint story of folding beds in long-ago Columbus, Ohio.

I ordered the thing in October and it is just scheduled for delivery this morning. As I shuffled things I glanced at the clock. Nine o'clock came and went. So did ten. I made a peanut butter sandwich at noon. It wasn't Thurber now. It was *Waiting for fucking Godot*.

I hate moving. What's more, I had a couple appointments in the afternoon and was getting anxious as I ferried loads of jetsam down the elevator. Or was it flotsam?

Damn.

I checked the e-mail periodically, business and private, to see if anything interesting had come in since I began my Motor Freight vigil. I found this from a pal on the West Coast. He was referring to my musings on the crowd who attended the State of the Union:

"Vic,

Thanks for sharing the memories. We had far fewer brushes with power in my family.

Most notably was at American Embassy Moscow, winter 1995. The wife of an Assistant Naval Attache and her seven-year-old daughter stood outside their apartment where the President's limo sat waiting for its passenger. It was cold, of course, but they were used to it, unlike the visiting American delegation.

Then a rush as the security detail and aides scurried to the waiting motorcade. As he strode toward the waiting Cadillac President Clinton noted the woman and her daughter. He stopped in front of them and smiled. The young girl, suddenly shy, looked down at her feet. The President offered his hand and said kindly, "Don't be shy." The young girl took his hand ... and connected for a second with the Great One of the moment.

We won't forget that."

It was touching. I glanced at the clock and decided to wait a little longer on the Murphy bed. I wrote him back immediately:

Hey, thanks for that! I did not have any significant interplay with the former President, just a brush. Still, I was in town for six of his eight years in the White House. It was a trip, beginning to end.

He was an extraordinary politician, maybe the best of our age. He really had the touch and he loved showing it. I was a few feet from him one time. He was finishing a round at Army Navy Arlington. I don't know how he played, but that isn't important. We comped him the membership as we do for all Presidents. He shot a birdie on #18 as we were walking by in the parking lot. He signed his scorecard, making sure we all knew what he had just done. The other three in his foursome faded away, invisible. Then the President worked the small crowd of us crusty military types who spent most of our professional time pillorying his defense policies and the gays-in-the-military thing.

The retired Navy Captain I was standing with gushed at him. "We love you, Bill!" he shouted. The President grinned that boyish grin of his and moved on.

My buddy *loathed* the man. It was amazing.

Then the President walked away from us and worked a wedding party that was emerging from the Clubhouse. They must be the most amazing wedding pictures ever. As he entered the big black SUV I saw him huddled with his advisors, the politicians face put away, his eyes intense, angry as the convoy sped away. I am sorry he was a flawed human being. He really could have lit the skies. But I'm afraid sometimes I share more of his flaws than I would like, and not nearly as much of the divine fire.

And you know, he is only a couple years older than we are. He is going to be back. Mark my words.

Vic"

I finished the note and mashed the button. I was late again, wasted morning, and well on the way to a wasted afternoon. When I got home they told me the bed had visited the building shortly after my departure and then driven away again. When I talked to the Motor Freight concern they asked me if I wouldn't mind waiting all day again today.

I told them to call me at the office. Maybe they could use some of that solid-state technology and pick up their fucking cell phone.

Creatures Stirring

I slept until 6:30, when the first gray light climbing down the side of the building and the first cars whooshing out on Route 50. My head was slightly musty from the Christmas Eve Cheer on Big Pink's fifth floor. The Fifth Floor is very eclectic, and frankly they don't care who knows it.

New Mardy One threw an open house last night. Mary Margaret the slim manager of the Dior at the Tysons Galleria did the public relations. I used to live two doors down, past the elevators. Montana the belly dancer was there (she doesn't drink anymore) and LaDonna and her 25 year old worldly-wise son (she moved out of her house and moved here to Big Pink) were there, and some older lady with a disapproving frown and a wonderful sense of humor. It was a very Big Pink sort of crowd, people who live in small places and heading in new directions.

It was a nice way to celebrate the holiday and not think about it too much. Over thinking can bring sadness and I try to avoid it. This was just about right. Not a great deal of thought at all.

There were good snacks, and I really enjoy destroying those port-wine processed cheese balls, the ones studded with crushed nuts. I only do it once a year, and usually buy one on sale after the holidays are safely dead. I was pretty sure I had one in my refrigerator, but didn't know where it had got off to. It might have rolled away on its own, sensing the onset of the season.

There had been a box waiting down at the desk for me when I got back from work. It was white, with green bold print shouting "Rush, Rush!" on the sides.

It was from my brother. He had it sent from the Ducktrap Fish Farm, of Belfast, Maine.

When I got it upstairs I began to open the container by layers. First there was cardboard, then thin strips of foam and a wad of brown paper to keep the silver foil bubble-wrap tightly positioned. Under the bubble wrap was one of those pouches of a gel that freezes. It was still mostly in its frozen state, and under that was a wooden box with the Ducktrap Logo burned into the top.

Inside the box were two smoked salmon filets and three little tubs of other

delicacies, mussels, shrimp and scallops.

I enjoyed the salmon he sent last year, and the shrimp and scallops were tasty. The mussels I was going to put into a sauce for some spaghetti *dan le fruit de la mer*, but I never got around to it and I think the mussels had something going with the cheese ball. I didn't see them apart until after the next Thanksgiving when they disappeared. I assume they went together.

The wrappings from Duck trap took up most of my little postage stamp kitchen, and there was a gift to me from me, via Amazon, a duplicate of one I sent my ailing pal in Pensacola. I knew the gift had arrived down there and was under the tree, but it appears that I mashed the button twice. Internet shopping has its perils, and we will see what other boxes show up in the next few days.

The seafood came from Belfast in Maine. That is where my high school pal George and his folks have their summer homes. It was once a blue-collar fishing town, on the glittering Penobscot Bay and we had some wild adventures in the pines and on the waters in our blustering days. I returned last summer when I had a long weekend from Harvard. I rented a car and drove from Boston on Route 1. The part on the coast was spectacular once I got out of New Hampshire. When I got past the lobster shacks and the little fishing villages I was quite surprised by what I found at Belfast.

They have torn down the chicken processing plant in the middle of town and replaced it with a new high-tech financial services campus.

I was intrigued to discover that the two credit cards that I had used to finance my divorce and half a college education for my older boy were headquartered right across from where the chickens used to escape and race panicked through the streets.

I owed the bank so much money at one point that they called me frequently, politely offering me a shovel to dig myself deeper in debt at quite favorable terms.

I thought for a while I would wind up a wholly owned subsidiary, since the favorable terms had finite life-spans. Lurking beyond the 4.1% introductory rate was a balloon rate that jumped to something like 21%. Rates like that used to be known as usury, and that was a crime, though apparently not in Maine.

But I didn't have much choice. I always paid more than the minimum

payment, but the legal bills were stiff and even at in-state rates, college cost close to \$20 grand a year for each of the kids.

The company sent me congratulatory notes periodically, cheerfully informing me that I had just qualified for additional ruin. I gradually floated up to have a \$32,000 limit on the one card and \$7,500 on the other, and at one point I had just about maxed them both out. Just before the balloon kicked in, I was able to get an unsecured loan for bogus hurricane damage from the secret credit union, and was able to walk away clean.

All that comes to me now from Belfast is seafood.

I took the smoked shrimp and salmon upstairs and the Fifth Floor Players.

We all have our tales of how we arrived here, and the shared marvel of it is always entertaining. The creatures were definitely stirring and there was talk of taking the singing on the road, maybe all the way down to the lobby. We wound up caroling in the hallway, which made the tunes reverberate, and stopped in different units to look at the Christmas trees.

There was general agreement that my handmade green plywood version was a model of efficiency. It was a pleasant interlude.

The contribution of the salmon got me an invite to the ham dinner the next day with the same cast of characters. I had intended to do something else, but by the time the laundry was done it was dark and the cocktail hour was looming.

The problem was, I think I agreed to provide scalloped potatoes. I looked in the fridge to see what I had. Butter was no problem, and cheese lasts just about forever. But I realized that the milk was undoubtedly bad, and I had only two small Idahos. They are a little soft and look like they might have known the cheese-ball and last year's mussels from Belfast.

Overhead Image

I saw the police on Monday, the day the death was discovered by the larger community.

There had been a suspicion that something was wrong for several days before the discovery. Ruth is Big Pink's dayshift Concierge. She does not drive, and consequently has a better handle on the neighborhood than many of the residents of the proud tower who travel only in splendid isolation in their motorcars.

She noticed something in the air, standing at the bus stop on the service drive at the end of her shift, as early as last week. She chalked it up to the application of fertilizer that comes each fall as part of putting the grounds to bed for the season.

She was right in some ways.

The service drive fronts the great canyon of Route 50, which at this point in its great sweep westward is six roaring lanes of traffic gouged deep into Virginia's red soil, flattening the natural curve of the highland on which Big Pink sits.

Although the posted speed limit is modest, drivers take advantage of the long straight-away to hurtle at interstate speeds under Glebe Road. I thought that might be what the Police were doing, setting up a speed trap to snarl the unwary on their way out to Fairfax County.

Two officers were working the problem when I approached on Monday afternoon, their cruiser parked diagonally across the entryway to the garden apartments on the corner. The woman stood on the concrete of the overpass, while the man leaned over the guardrail, looking down.

I passed them without incident, wondering about the County fitness standards. They both were very large people in their uniforms and bullet-proof vests. I was wheeling the gray car into Big Pink's drive when the male officer stood up and I saw that the device in his hands was not a speed-gun but a digital camera.

I did not think much of it until I called Ruth from the office to ask if I had been placed on report by Leo the Engineer. It was the semi-annual inspection of the convector units in all the apartments on the fourth floor that morning, and lost in mysteries of ancient missile technology, had fled the building without moving the furniture away from the radiator.

I hoped I was not in trouble, and though she assured me that there were not consequences to my mental lapse, she seemed distracted and not her normal cheerful self. When I saw her again, I asked if I had caught her at a bad time.

She smiled and said, "No, it was just all the commotion about the dead man. It had us a little flustered."

I was startled by that, and naturally asked for the whole story. The details were sketchy outside of the police investigation. A County crew had made the discovery during routine brush cutting; the smell had attracted them and the regular Police were summoned; crime scene tapes were strung and a perimeter established to keep the small crowd of retirees at bay; the Fire Department was dispatched with a specialized hoist and body bag; Paramedics went over the parapet and confirmed the source of the odor and extracted the corpse.

That is as much as anyone knew, and speculation was all that remained. I went back to Fred's office. He is a large and jovial man with a sly sense of humor. He retired from the Phone Company years ago, and his new career is as Big Pink's building manager, the Mayor of the campus.

He rolled his eyes. Being just outside the perimeter and on County land, there had been no mention by the authorities of a recovery operation. With the number of retirees in the building, it is not uncommon for the ambulances to arrive at the front entrance, lights on but no sirens.

He noted the passage of the emergency vehicles through the window of his office, which looks out over the back parking lot. A conscientious administrator, he naturally went outside to investigate and seen if any of his tenants on the first floor had expired; he mentioned the possible candidates and I nodded in agreement.

He followed the lights around the building to the scene of activity just across the Service Drive.

"There are three theories," he said. "It might be a pedestrian who got hit and thrown over the rail, or a pedestrian from down on Route 50 who was thrown into the bushes down below." He made a church steeple with his fingers in front of his nose. "Or, of course, it could have been one of the homeless who was living down there and just died."

I asked him if the body could have been dumped after an altercation elsewhere, and he said he didn't know. Just that it was male.

I went upstairs and got out of my work-clothes and into my walking togs. First stop on the evening walk was a visit to the crime scene, and a personal investigation.

I walked from the main entrance of the building, across the manicured grounds and under the ornamental foliage to the service drive. I crossed over to the narrow verge of grass, now neatly trimmed. I was careful to lean away from the road, since I did not want to be hit and thrown over the side; the drivers move fast as they accelerate up the ramp onto the highway.

I looked down from a position near where I had seen the policeman the day before. Something moved at the base of the concrete wall, startling me.

It was a squirrel, one of the dark ones that is actively foraging for winter food. Leaning forward again I saw that part of the mystery was solved.

Below was a little campsite. An awning of plastic sheet was slung from the bushes, and a bedraggled mattress was partly below it. There has been no rain for a month, and the cover was unnecessarily in the unseasonable heat. Trash bags and water jugs were strewn around the camp. The bushes obscured the view completely from the high-speed traffic and the view from above was one that had to be made with deliberation.

I followed the guardrail until the concrete stopped and a well-worn spot of earth showed how the campers gained access. Another, less well developed camp was about thirty feet away from the mattress, leaves gathered as a nest and a few dozen empty large bottles of Schlitz Malt Liquor marking the spot.

I did not go down. The overhead image was enough for me.

I went on to my normal walk, the sun lowering in the West. Homeless men, living at the base of the wall in front of Big Pink. I tumbled that thought over as I walked. Did the occupant of the second camp want to move up to the comfort of a dirty bed? Could there have been a malt-fueled altercation in the night, next to the whizzing cars?

Was there just a man dying alone on his mattress? Either way, I stayed up long enough to catch the local news to see if the local media had picked up the story.

The death passed without remark or comment, and I went to my own bed under a strong, thick roof.

Security, 2003



The President had addressed the Nation last night, and I watched him with curiosity, sound on mute. The radio was filled with commentary about what he had said, the new commitment to operations against Terror in Iraq. It is better to meet the enemy in his own neighborhood, is what they say he said.

That was interesting, considering the fact that the Anniversary is coming up this week and we had an Event over the weekend. The building is still buzzing about the real-life police drama, and I got into it with Mrs. Hitler, chairman of the Finance Committee of the Building. Mrs. Hitler isn't her real name, since not even the Fuhrer would have asked for her hand, even when he was on top of his game.

She is a one-woman strike force for order and discipline. She is a big Nordic woman with a thick mane of blonde hair that cries out for braids and a bosom the demands silver armor.

My first encounter with her was a few months after I arrived at The Big Pink Building where I live. I was listening to my little transistor radio by the pool. The Lifeguard was listening to one as I signed in, and I set up camp at the table under the yellow umbrella as far away from anyone as you can get and still be inside the fence. I was listening happily, reading, when a strident voice called out from the other side of the sparkling blue water.

"That is not permitted here. You *must* wear headphones!" It was the Valkyrie right out of a Wagnerian Opera, intent on enforcing the rules. All of them. I swear she had a copy of the by-laws in her purse, just in case a requirement came up for on-the-spot enforcement.

I put on my earphones and waved in a desultory manner. Only owners can attend the meetings and vote on the rules, of course, and it is a constant challenge to keep the residents who have sub-let the units under control and in good order. We are only a step away from anarchy.

I noticed thereafter that she was in the middle of everything at the Building, from the opening Pool Party on Memorial Day right through the building-wide

rummage sale in early October. I made a point of staying out of her way. But I have assumed a higher profile in the closed circuit of life of the Building since I decided to buy one of the units down by the pool. I can't afford it, but I will not be thrown out of another lease.

I owned my own home for almost twenty years before I had to give it away.

Being on a lease and one month away from eviction and being out on the street had been a theoretical thing when I lived in 202. At least it was until the landlady told me her situation had changed, and her evil step-daughters were throwing her out of her dead husband's place and she had to move back to Big Pink.

I looked at the phone blankly, wondering where I was going to have to move all my crap again. I had been lucky to find the place to rent on the fifth floor, though the timing was a little awkward, and wound up with an ugly little scene by the elevator as I was moving the last shopping cart of books and cookware out as the landlady's workmen were coming in.

The way the real estate market was going, it was completely possible that I would not only never be able to afford a house again, it was possible I could not even afford an efficiency apartment.

Paying two college tuitions out of pocket was *killing* me. If I thought about it too much I would go nuts.

I had walked through the efficiency down by the pool over the weekend. Hank was sitting on a chair in the corner, and with nothing in the place, it looked pretty roomy, even if there was only the one room. The kitchen still had the original cabinets from 1964, though they had been painted over. You could still see the ghosts of the original painted trim if you looked at it sideways in the light. It was as basic as you get.

No dishwasher, of course, but if I actually owned it, no one could throw me out on my ass again.

I wrote an earnest-money check on an account that had overdraft protection, and made an offer for just what Hank was asking on behalf of the retired FBI agent who owned the place.

Hank is quite the man. He owns four or five units in Big Pink, and partners with Joe, the Association President on buying the ones that come on the market when the residents die, fixing them up and flipping them.

I was dangerously near being able to attend the meetings and vote and everything. I know Mrs. Hitler knows that, and is lording it over me while she can. She knows everything. Between her and Jack, the cigar-smoking septuagenarian Lothario they have the book on all of us.

I got back to the unit around eight-fifteen on Saturday night. It had been a long day of chores and cleaning and I enjoyed the order I had re-established in the little apartment. I went out on my balcony to smoke and look at the night sky.

The moon was bright and Mars still provided a dramatic presence in the evening sky. But my attention was diverted immediately by what was happening five floors below.

There were white police cruisers lined up abreast all down the service drive, completely blocking it. Two were abreast right in front of the canopy that covers the approach to the main entrance. One of them had big numbers on the top- "47." The others might have belonged to supervisors, though I don't have the book on Arlington response.

I could count seven official vehicles and there were lights flashing down the drive to the west and officers walking around with some urgency. I saw one stout officer with an evidence bag filled with something. I couldn't see what. He was wearing blue disposable gloves.

Arlington's cops are speedy and professional. They came to the Pentagon on that awful day, two years ago, it being in their jurisdiction.

There was clearly something going on, and it was far better than television.

I smoked a couple cigarettes, watching the occupants of the civilian sedan exchange some heated words with the police and screech off backwards. Other cars belonging to residents approached the cluster of police cruisers and stopped, confused.

This is not a common occurrence at Big Pink. I could only see clearly the space immediately below. The trees blocked the view to the right and left. I watched the red lights winking through the leaves and then there was a commotion to my left. A slim figure appeared, handcuffed, and was gently placed face first on the dirt next to the ornamental flowers on the Route 50 side of the service drive.

The police patted him down and left him like that, treating him carefully and all of them wearing the blue disposable gloves. After a few minutes they loaded him into the squad car horizontally, like a sack of grain.

In about fifteen minutes they were all gone and the night returned to silence and the whoosh of fast-movers on the six-lanes of concrete.

I decided to roller-blade early Sunday morning since I had to go to the office and work on a proposal. I stopped at the front desk to ask what had happened.

Carol was on. She is a nice lady with orange frizzy hair and a distracted manner. She had the morning shift and said she didn't know, though it was clear that she wanted to talk. I asked her what it said in the logbook and she pulled the red leather journal out of a little cubbie behind the oak desk.

She opened to the last page and said "Ivory had the desk last night. She called the police around eight o'clock. There were young men breaking into cars. A Resident came in and told Ivory, and then went out again and they were breaking the window on the car he just parked. They called 911 right then."

"Really?" I said. "I had better go check out my car and my truck." I was a little concerned. I don't drive the truck much, since it is a classic and I want to keep the miles off of it. But it is a desirable little rocket with very expensive tires. I turned to walk out the back, but the words continued to flow out of Carol. I turned and listened sympathetically.

If the windows were smashed or the tires stolen a few minutes wasn't going to make any difference, right?

Carol told me about the sounds in the night, the groups of men who occupied little crannies over on the church grounds across the road, the taunts and the whistles when she walked to her car late at night.

The desk is manned twenty-four seven, so she pulled her shifts in the small hours. Our spacious campus is home to many young men who flee the heat and closeness of the little garden apartments that adjoin our grounds, and Carol and the other women who work the desk are afraid. They hear the murmuring in other languages in the cloak of darkness.

I hadn't thought about it and assumed that things were OK.

It is the difference between men and women, or one of them, anyway.

Seeing the world from the vantage of a target, and everything male on two feet as a potential threat.

I made a sympathetic remark and walked out to check my fleet. Both were OK. I put on my blades and skated around to the front of the building. The only trace I could find of anything untoward was a pair of blue disposable gloves. I worked up a sweat and then went to the office.

When I came back they were talking about it at the pool, Leslie and the group of women with her were very concerned.

We were still talking about it after I cooked dinner and went down to plunge in the cool water before the guard closed the pool down.

There is one week and one weekend to go before they close the pool.

I don't know what I am going to do for social interaction. Once the gate is locked for the Fall and the big green tarp goes on, there is no place we can hang out and gossip.

I was talking to the lifeguard when Mrs. Hitler swept up the walkway. I asked her if she had heard about the incident, goading her a bit.

"I chair the Finance Committee and our night security is in good order. We have an unobtrusive presence on the grounds, and it is quite adequate. We have not had an incident in five years and the man who was arrested here last week did not struggle as he was removed. People gossip too much."

She made a disparaging comment about immigrants and cut it short, realizing the guard was half-Persian and was often mistaken for one of the Hispanics from the apartment complex next door.

"Well," I said "I have twenty-seven years of military experience and unobtrusive is not the way to go." Unobtrusive seemed to me to be a code word for "resources." It is about money, after all. More guards or a visible presence is going to cost money and make the fees go up.

Big Pink is going to be fifty years old next year, and the good bones of the pink brick are creaking.

"Besides," she sniffed, "as a renter, your opinion is not relevant."

"I'll fix that," I said grimly and she rushed away, probably to scold whoever was on the desk for rumor-mongering.

I held back long enough that I did not have to ride the elevator up with her.

I was stewing on her remark. Valkyrie or not, at least she was volunteering her time to keep the place afloat. She gave of her own time to make things better, just the way the President has asked us all to volunteer to go to the mall and keep shopping.

Maybe I will volunteer for something, too, when I am an owner and can go to the meetings.

There is a tide of humanity that has swept over the neighborhood, and it breaks on the side of the building, swirling around and past on all sides.

It just doesn't seem to be enough to hold back the tide of humanity that had swept over Arlington. There are so many people in those little garden apartments it is no wonder that they spend a lot of time outside. It is a challenge to keep order on the grounds of this Big Pink Building, to keep the campus placid in the night.

When I got up to the apartment the President was on the TV. I hit the mute button and watched his lips move. I heard the next morning that the theme of the address was Sept. 11, which the President said ought not to happen again. It was a reason, he said, to stay the course in Iraq.

"For America, there will be no going back to the era before September the 11th, 2001, to false comfort in a dangerous world," he said. "We have learned that terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness."

The "surest way" to avoid attacks on Americans, the President said, "is to engage the enemy where he lives and plans" so that "we do not meet him again on our own streets, in our own cities."

I turned it off when his lips stopped moving.

They are already here, Mr. Bush. And the \$88 billion he is going to request to stabilize Iraq doesn't begin to address *that*.

The Man and the Plan

From the Arlington Star, November 1979:

Colonial Village, Buckingham, Big Pink, Hyde Park, Claremont.

Within the last six months, five major Arlington County apartment complexes have been sold to out-of-state buyers. The sales affect as many as 10,000 tenants, many of them elderly or recently arrived ethnic minorities who live on low to moderate incomes.

Since the sales, anxious tenants and curious county officials alike have been speculating about the new owners' plans. Last week, multimillionaire real estate developer James D. Kinghoffer of Columbus, Ohio, bought the Buckingham, Big Pink, Hyde Park and Claremont Apartments, plus two small shopping centers adjacent to Buckingham and Claremont and a large tract of vacant land on South Four Mile Run.

Buckingham (1,800 units), Hyde Park (323 units) and Big Pink (250 units) are located on a tract assembled by the late industrialist Allie S. Freed, and developed by his widow, Frances. The properties were regarded as trail-blazing designs in their day.

Mrs. Freed retired as president of the Paragon Communities in the early 1970s due to a lengthy illness. She passed away in November, 1975, and the properties have been shopped around by her son Gerald ever since.

"The hot market is out in Fairfax," said an associate, who did not wish to be named. "We are pressing hard to develop the area east of the Star Tank Farm just outside the Beltway with contemporary houses on large lots. We are seeing a real pattern of flight from the area. The houses in Arlington are too small."

Several months ago a subsidiary of the Texas Company bought Colonial Village (1,092 units), located across from the Hyde Park Apartments.

James "Buckeye" Kinghoffer, the man who became one of Arlington's biggest landlords last week, is a multimillionaire real estate developer from Ohio who owns a string of properties from coast to coast.

Kinghoffer plunged into the Arlington real estate market with \$48 million, buying the Paramount Community's 200-acre package, which included four apartment complexes, two small neighborhood shopping centers and a large tract of vacant land.

It was one of the biggest real estate transactions in Arlington in recent years.

Kinghoffer said he does not plan to convert any of the complexes to condominiums. He said a major three-year rehabilitation of the Buckingham Neighborhood, the largest and oldest of the four, would begin shortly, and that tenants would not be displaced despite the construction.

The high-rise Hyde Park and Big Pink apartments will continue to operate unchanged, Kinghoffer said. "I don't quite know what to do with Claremont," he admitted. Like Buckingham, Claremont is a garden apartment project that houses a large number of elderly people and families on fixed incomes.

"We basically bought it as a long-term real estate investment," said Kinghoffer.

At 41, Buckeye Kinghoffer does not match the profile of a multi-millionaire developer who breezes in and out of town, beating dozens of New York shark by plunking down millions of dollars in the midst of an energy crisis for a property that's been on the market for over a year. He shuns the limelight.

"I'm a long-term real estate holder," said Kinghoffer, who has a trim athletic profile and well-tanned face. Like Governor Reagan of California, he dresses in a brown pin-striped suit. His tie is a shiny orange, and he has neither cufflinks nor watch.

"While condominium conversion is a possibility, it seems that the property is good as a long-term asset," said Kinghoffer who has built apartments and townhouses in Springfield, Reston and Columbia. "We didn't do a hell of a lot of looking at Arlington. To me the location is incredible. I thought (\$48 million) was cheap."

Kinghoffer's rehabilitation plans for Buckingham, which was built in 1937, include air-conditioning the apartments, putting in new kitchens and laundry rooms and extensively landscaping the grounds. Kinghoffer said he expects the improvements will cost tenants a maximum of \$50 per month in rent increases. Rents currently range from \$198 for a one-bed-room apartment to \$310 for a three-bedroom unit.

"Buckingham is built like a fort. There are copper gutters, slate roofs, parquet or solid oak floors. But I think the kitchens are the pits and the grounds are lousy. Have you been to the laundry rooms there? They're horrible: two dryers blowing away, not enclosed, and the washers just empty into this big barrel in the middle of the room. I can't believe anybody goes down there."

Among his chief concerns, Kinghoffer said, is providing housing for a variety of tenants and improving the deteriorating "quality of life" at Buckingham. "Are you single?," Kinghoffer asked suddenly. "Let me ask you a marketing question: What do you think of a setting aside a section of Buckingham for single girls-not banning men or anything-but putting a heavy emphasis on security? I think if you analyze a lot of tenancies you'd find a lot of single women living there on the lower end of the wage scale.

"I don't want to throw out the Vietnamese or the elderly and substitute them with girls, but we try to cater to tenants' needs. I'm just thinking out loud, but maybe we could take 500 units and specialize in "over 50" tenants. I'm trying to find out what it is these people want"

He said several members of his staff would be poring over rental records in the next few weeks trying to determine the types of tenants who live at Buckingham.

Kinghoffer, his wife and four children are spending this year living in a building he owns in San Francisco. "I commute to Columbus once a week," he said, noting wistfully that the recent gas crisis had hurt everyone. He sold his private airplane and now travels by commercial jet.

A native of a small town in Ohio and a graduate of Ohio State University, Kinghoffer built one of his first projects when he was a first-year medical student at Stanford University in the late 1950s. "I borrowed a lot of

money," he recalled, "and then took a year's leave of absence to finish it and never went back."

"Arlington has one choice," said Buckeye, who apparently views Buckingham as a microcosm of Arlington.

"Does it want to be a declining lower-middle class community, or does it want to be an upper-middle class community? It's got two things going for it: location and convenience. Its long-term future has to be to continue to upgrade its housing.