

Mil Mania

The Official Newsletter of [www.ARTISTINSANE.COM](http://www.artistsinsane.com)

Welcome To The March/April Issue of *Mil Mania!*

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Well, it's been a hard fought battle, but at last here's the latest issue of this — indeed ongoing — publication. It's merely been an "insane" spring — as evidenced by snow in mid-April and a world record rainfall here in the Northeast.

Be that as it may, there's also much to write about — and so many changes and updates to what's already been written that May's issue may have to be the longest yet just to keep up. For starters, the hope expressed in the "Ravings of a Mad Woman" review have already been dashed since that piece was composed — which makes me even more convinced it was the right topic to cover before it disappears for good.

There's also much more to report on the artists covered in the "Music Mayhem" section — plus a "growing" part of the "menagerie" to cover in greater detail.

But all of that is for next month. This issue might be said to contain "enough trouble of its own"...as Keela wrestles with "Elvis", novel hero Josh wrestles with "Demons, Drink, etc..." and the "Black Donnellys" battle for turf in Hell's Kitchen one more time.

Read on to learn more. And, of course — Happy Spring!!!!

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NEW!!! Check out the latest updates to www.artistsinsane.com — including a [quick reference page](#) to the wealth of info on the artists covered in the "Music Mayhem" section every month.

AND... meet the newest members of my rat family via photos (**PLUS A VIDEO!!!**) page. Enjoy to the "Mil's Menagerie" page. Happy!!!!

Newsletter Spotlight

Happy (belated) St. Patrick's Day...

from an Irish lad...

...an Irish lass...

...and an Irish artist insane!!!

AND, of course...

Happy Easter!!!

Music Mayhem

As noted in the December 2005 edition of *Mil Mania*, I continue to include news in every issue to keep readers up to date on the latest happenings with the three acts most prominently featured on www.artistsinsane.com. However, I now also choose one additional artist — in some cases a new discovery I've recently made, in others an individual or group whose work I've long appreciated — to make a one-time appearance here. And, as with all aspects of *Mil Mania*, feel free to offer suggestions.

This month's featured artist:

John Fratella — You probably haven't heard of this artist before; nor will you find his work at your local CD store or online retailer. Rather, as an unsung artistic hero, this 83 years young piano player shares his art — and, as Keela's madvice question last month mentioned, *he-art* — primarily at nursing homes and nutrition program sites for the elderly. What's more, as his (quite vast) repertoire tends toward upbeat standards and classics ranging from Frank Sinatra to Elvis, he is amazed himself at how his gift touches those for whom these songs bear special meaning tied to long-ago memories...evidence of a humility level to which we should all aspire.

Introduced recently through another friend, I feel privileged to have met this vibrant, interesting and interested individual. And, having been further privileged to enjoy both his "ticking of the ivories" and lively conversation for several hours last night, I thought it wonderfully appropriate to today pass on the acquaintance.

Third Eye Blind recently kicked off its spring tour in hometown San Francisco (playing shows to commemorate the 10th anniversary of their debut album's release, as announced in last month's issue). To read more about these, and check out when they may be visiting a city near you, as always you can go to [The Village Churchyard](#) or [Jen's SJ.com](#).

In the meantime you can read an article/brief interview with Stephan Jenkins by clicking the following link... <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/03/11/PKGLFOFM021.DTL&type=music>

While on the topic, I must confess I found a certain comment in the aforementioned piece a bit disconcerting, and perhaps a slight cause for alarm. "I think this album is going to be more political..." Stephan said, adding the contradictory statement, "but there's nothing worse than a political song." Actually, that last bit may prove the saving grace in my continued admiration for his work, since I couldn't agree more. If indeed the finished product as a whole is comprised of largely political themes, however, for me no salvation may be possible. See the article under "Temporary Insanity" at right for a fuller explanation.

Brian Fitzpatrick returned to the stage this month as well, and I (at last!) had the privilege of catching one of these shows. You can read my review, complete with photos by clicking here... www.artistsinsane.com/paulh's_bar_3-3-07.htm.

In other news, I got a sneak preview of two songs expected to be included on the next Brian Fitzpatrick CD and I can tell you beyond question that if the rest are up to the same standard of songwriting and creative use of instrumentation (which I'm fully confident they'll be) fans are in for an album well worth the bit longer than usual wait.

Brian's other creative endeavor — graphic design — has also produced some highly rewarding results of late...several of which have received various highly deserved rewards...including a gold record for the artwork on a Rolling Stones project, and landing a much sought after contract for the DVD box set release of (John Lennon's favorite filmmaker) Alejandro Jodorowsky's films. Congrats, Brian!!!

And, let's not forget that other graphic design project...about which someone who's seen it has said, "the great Brian Fitzpatrick was tapped to do the artwork and came up with a magnificent concept I think you'll all dig." What's more as noted on his [myspace page](#), he's likewise the driving force behind a music video for this artist as well — and I'm sure I'm not the only one who can't wait to see the (certain to be incredible) finished product.

That artist being, of course...

Michael McDermott — another singer/songwriter who took to the stage for a number of shows in March...all to excellent notice...one of which you can read about by clicking [here](#).

That said, though, I must confess the disappointment expressed above regarding Third Eye Blind has spread to this longtime favorite artist as well. During a 2001 appearance he noted, "I'm not a very political man. I'm not even interested in politics. But I am interested in the politics of the human heart." — a beautiful statement, in complete harmony with my own heart, and "to [his] own self [most] true" (at least, so I firmly believe, given the enormous body of work previously created from his own "he-art").

Based on the recent prominence of a song called "The American In Me," however, it seems he too has increasingly adopted an unfortunate tendency toward conventional politicizing...such that if this were the first McDermott song I'd ever heard (especially since neither do I find it at all musically distinctive), I strongly fear it would also be the last. And that, in my opinion, would be a tragedy. Again, I direct you to the "Temporary Insanity" column for a fuller explanation of my objections.

That bit of (I assure you, constructively intended) criticism aside, I continue to wait eagerly for the rest of the new album...and the video currently in production for what I already know to be a favorite track on it, "Mess of Things."

I also applaud the renewed **Monday Morning Musical Madness** on [Michael's page](#) at [myspace.com](#) that recently brought a great new version of "Darkest Night of All"...and a spoken word poem about Chicago. What's more, since the latter of these was made available for download, I've added it to my website (see the March 7th entry on the [Setlists](#) page) for your listening pleasure.

BUT — where are those East Coast show dates, anyway!!!!!!!

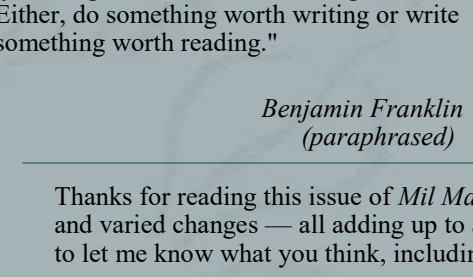
As always, feel free to drop by my "space" at **MYSACE MUSIC** (www.myspace.com/artistsinsane)

Comments from *Mil Mania* readers on the February issue...

"The [m]advice column was fun. I had thought that 'To thine own self be true' was Emerson or Thoreau. I see it's much older..." J.B.

"I can't let the topic of Prince go by without chiming in (as my heart flutters at the thought of him, I confess). Purple Rain — what a pivotal album/film for Prince and an all-around musical phenomenon. Thanks for bringing this classic to light last month. I'm always fascinated by the impact Purple Rain made in peoples' lives. Always makes a great conversation — as does the artist himself. The critics can pan him, praise him, be misinformed in their chiding, while thinking otherwise, but, simply, the man is brilliant. The last time I saw him live he did an audience sing-a-long with a couple verses of 'Cream' (Diamonds & Pearls): 'Make the rules,' he sang, and asked for it re-bounded from us, then sang 'then break 'em all cuz you are the best,' again asking for the line back. To Prince's standards, it was a feeble attempt on our part. So he told us to go home, look in the mirror and sing that — because we are the best, he said. He's pretty alright too!" L.P.

My new rodent friend, Noah, has been selected as a Rat Fan Club "Rat of the Week".



Check this page... www.ratfanclub.org/ratweek.html

...to read his profile when it appears (no date on that yet, I'm afraid...soon I hope!)

Ravings of a Mad Woman

This column corresponds with the **Mad Ravens** on section of www.artistsinsane.com, and is dedicated to selected reviews of movies, television and books... most of which are unlikely to represent "the latest" in any of these categories, but rather a random selection that represents a new and/or noteworthy discovery to me.

In honor of St. Patrick's Day (as though this issue's special occasion(s), I thought I'd review the new Irish-themed television series...

The Black Donnellys — A tale of four Irish brothers in New York's Hell's Kitchen, this crime drama is told in flashbacks by a member of their gang who is now in prison. How he got there or how much of what he shares may be the truth remains to be revealed... or not. For, secrets and lies are the central rules of existence in the Donnellys' circle of disorganized crime. And, what constitutes the truth in their world is likewise highly subjective. What's concrete, however, is the bond of family they share... and the cement shoes for which one or all seem destined to be fitted before the end of any given episode.

That potential outcome, of course, provides one impetus for watching. By the same token, however, if one didn't quickly form a bond with the characters in danger, neither would one really care how their problems are resolved. In fact, I must say I've seen some shows/films so poorly written and acted that I've rooted for the "bad guys" to get it over with once and for all by putting the "good" ones out of my misery.

Even in those instances, though, it's seldom very difficult to figure out who the bad guys are. Part of this show's "charm" for lack of a better word, is derived instead from exploring just how far such clear delineations can be blurred... most notably in the character of eldest brother, Tommy (who unceremoniously manages to commit and cover-up murder yet exude a believable blend of integrity and innocence [via the superb acting of Jonathan Tucker] in the process). Tommy aspires only to a peaceful law-abiding life after art school, and, yes, maybe catching the brass ring of a longtime love — modest hopes ever threatened by the darker tendencies and goals of his deeply gangster-tied siblings... not to mention the never wanting to learn might just lie within himself. Then again, once you meet the brothers' loving yet touch-as-naïls mom, you might glean a bit of insight as to where these conflicting sides of Tommy's nature originate.

Although early on it seems Tommy might be able to co-exist without becoming a co-conspirator in his siblings' dark activities, it's the "good" within that continually conspires against him. Learning that the joint ventures of brothers Jimmy (the bumbling ringleader) and Kevin (a hopeless gambler) have led to injury to youngest brother Sean... and will soon lead to worse for one of them, it's Tommy's family loyalty that turns the dilemma of life or death for Jimmy into death to his own life — at least as he once knew it. As expected, the cost of that choice is high... and, we soon learn, ever growing. And, of course — too late — it's proved time and again there's not merely "no going back"; there's also a precious little to look forward to. Still, hanging on to what somehow remains is, in often unexpected ways, turning into Tommy's toughest challenge.

Yes, it's all been done before — and undoubtedly in a few ways could be done a little better. Still, I'd be lying — or, perhaps, I should say, "full of blarney" — myself if I didn't admit I've come to look forward to spending an hour on the edge of my seat Monday nights... hoping fervently that the "good" bad guy will come out on top. — or at the very least, live to fight another day. Here's to these brothers continuing to survive the truly mean streets of their New York — and the even meaner whims of the TV industry — for a very long time to come.

In the meantime, you can meet them and get caught up on — and in — their world at the show's official website... <http://www.nbc.com/The.Black.Donnellys>.

In A Nutshell

"If a man could have half of his wishes, he would double his troubles."

"As we must account for every idle word, so we must account for every idle silence."

"If you wish to be remembered even after you are gone, do one of two things... Either, do something worth writing or write something worth reading."

Benjamin Franklin (paraphrased)

Thanks for reading this issue of *Mil Mania!* and varied changes — all adding up to a new and improved publication...so I hope! Please drop me a line and all suggestions. Thank you!!!

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As introduced in the first issue of *Mil Mania*, this column presents the latest chapter in the "prequel" to my screenplay, *Taking the Fall*. While the script picks up four years after the suicide of the main character (Joshua Gray)'s girlfriend, the novel begins with that act itself, and the portion shared here continues to document events taking place in the weeks after the funeral... (you can [sign up](#) on prior chapters by viewing back issues on the [Mil Mania](#) [sign-up page](#)).

The Leap to Limbo (tentative title), Chapter 14

"Demons, Drink and Dreams of Deliverance"

Josh is seated at the bar of a tavern two doors down from the hotel. Still stung from the talk with — or lecture from — Chris, he downs the double Jack Daniels in front of him, thinking humorlessly how nice it is to have a totally unrelated reason for the cacophony of confusion in his head and ceaseless ringing in his ears. Uninterested at the moment in either the *intent* or *content* of Chris' speech, he gulps down his drink, sucking in his breath sharply as the liquor burns a fiery trail to his stomach and tears begin to ooze unwittingly in response. He shakes his head and squeezes the fingers of one hand against his eyes. After a moment his body's revolt against the alcohol subsides and he removes his hand, trying to focus on his surroundings as he does so. Gradually, he becomes aware of a woman seated near the opposite end of the bar, who he realizes has witnessed this whole scene and is now watching with an expression Josh can't quite decide leans more toward pity or amusement — neither of which he finds particularly flattering, though both understandable. He frowns...more at himself than her; briefly embarrassed by her own impertinence she blushes slightly and turns away. Something in this movement registers with Josh as oddly familiar and it becomes his turn to stare as he attempts to will his increasingly dulled mind to focus on this new and elusive ghost. As she steals a glance once more in his direction and finds his eyes still on her she smiles gently, an expression that prompts a flash of clarity and the memory of another encounter with burning liquid — in L.A.

But this is Seattle. Is she following him? Too ridiculous a thought to fleetingly consider — even in a semi-drunken, clearly stupid stupor — he blames himself. Realizing that to just go talk to her would be a still more stupid act, he nonetheless stands up and makes his slightly unsteady way to the stool beside her...more than amazed she hasn't (wisely) bolted by the time he actually sits down.

"You were in L.A. — that night. How could you be here?" Josh begins in halting confusion.

"You were there. And you're here," she responds with a slight grin, her tone surprisingly non-sarcastic in his jest.

Pressing on with the dogged insidious peculiar to a "drunk" he continues.

"Well, I know how you got here — I mean, I don't have any idea how you got here... but I see how you could have, you know, driven or flown or — ah, geez. I'm sorry. I'll just be heading off to find a really big rock to crawl under now. And, please, I beg of you — forget I was ever, uh... here."

Still smiling, she replies, "Does that mean you'd rather I remember you with coffee all over your pants than a bit of egg on your face?"

Muddled more by her kindness than the alcohol, Josh hesitates. Suddenly he blurts, "Why do you talk to me?" She claps a hand to his forehead and rolls his eyes. "Another brilliant statement. Sorry..."

"Why does anybody talk to anybody...at least at first?" she responds frankly... then adds after a pause, "Actually, the first time was because I saw you... I heard you — your 'Secrets'..."

His brain spins; he feels fear rising as a list of implications ticks off in his brain. She continues.

"Your song... 'Secrets' — remember. You depicted it that night. It was honest... moving. It was...," a smile creeping in again, "... brilliant."

Overcome by her words, Josh looks at the floor and feels the sting of tears once more. How could anyone see brilliance in him? Oh sure, history had recorded countless tales of artistic genius wrought at the hands of insane minds and dissipated lives. But he was no Van Gogh, Modigliani or Mozart. And he knew it. He'd never pretended to be anyone other than a guy with a guitar and a headful of ideas... and yeah, sometimes a heavy heart... — or couldn't, say "out loud." But, this was no romantic fairy tale of immortal greatness that made up for a short "real" life. Like Woody Allen said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying." Yeah, he was definitely more realistic than to take it quite that far, but standing here before this strangely encouraging musician stranger, how he wished he could just feel normal again... just go back to being the guy with a guitar he used to know... the one fighting with his bandmates and fellow musician friends for the chance to make a life at what he loved. Not losing sight of what that might even mean — while fighting with his bandmates and fellow musician friends at every chance — with nothing whatsoever to gain... and a lot to lose.

Josh reached blindly to hug the woman beside him only to find her gone... another ghost vanished in the night... another being to whom his attachment had yet again proved nothing more than a figment of his own (overactive?) imagination. He opened his eyes to see but the darkness of the hotel room and feel the thin linen bed sheet clutched within his palms. He let go, buried his head in the pillow, and cried.

Temporary Insanity

I doubt it's surprising that a writer would enjoy used bookstores, sales of retired books at the local library, etc. Of course, I invariably end up with more titles than I could ever hope to read — especially by the time the next opportunity to buy more rolls around! In those I actually get to crack the covers, however, I've found many bits of interesting information that stay with me from that time on, and which sometimes even help me provide a coherent explanation for things I've already long intuitively believed. And, such discoveries naturally find a way into my own writing at some point down the road.

Having thrown down the gauntlet of my distaste for artists waxing political in this month's "Music Mayhem" section, I mention my used book fetish as I once purchased a volume called *The Portable World Bible*. Offering selected excerpts of each religion's holy scriptures, the book also features a very thorough yet concise overview to preface the various sections. And, it was through this book that I came to formulate what I believe a most appropriate analogy regarding politics and art.

I have long contended that I strongly believe art to be a spiritual force. One's artistic gifts, while expressions of the individual artist's intellect, feelings, and certain other "tangible intangibles," if you will, are nonetheless just that: inexplicable gifts of giving love... and which once shared, can reach the deepest recesses of other beings and equally inexpressible... and yet real — ways. And, their produce — music, paintings, sculpture, or anything else — when they affect the beholder, do so in unmistakably deep and personal ways. In the process, they have the capacity to effect change... in the way we see ourselves and the world around us... and in the way we treat and interact with others.

Back to the *Portable World Bible*, among the religions discussed therein are Taoism and Confucianism... the most notable distinction between which, this book noted, is their differing approaches to achieving spiritual maturity; Taoism — like art — is based on change from the inside out. If one changes how a person thinks, what he believes, his understanding of life, etc., his outward behavior will change as a result... ultimately leading to a unity of body and spirit, and a mature productive life/contributions to society. Confucianism, by contrast, is based on a highly ordered system of rituals and their repetition... the thinking behind which being that change must be effected from the outside in: if a person consistently acts in a certain way, he will come to incorporate that way into his "self," again thereby attaining a unity of body and spirit, and a mature productive life. One end; very different means.

Hence we arrive at my take on the difference between art and politics. In its elemental form, government too seeks to achieve change for the betterment of society. Its manner of doing so, however, is to implement various systems of laws to alter individual actions — in other words, causing change from the outside in. And, despite — or perhaps even because of — the very like ends both art and politics look to attain, I see them as somewhat akin to same-charge magnets: two forces that were never intended to be successfully joined.

I find it an interesting tangential circumstance that churches are officially prohibited from endorsing any candidate — in fact facing loss of their non-profit status for becoming too politically involved. Frankly, I don't think it would be a bad idea for artists who jump on their campaign soapboxes to be somehow penalized as well. Unfortunately, it's instead the members of their fanbases who suffer.

Notice I haven't attached any side or party to that assertion. Lest one might think I'm making it out of some personal grudge against specific comments in support of someone I dislike or opposed to someone I do, that's not the case. I'm an equal opportunity dissembler of all political artists (and/or entertainers, actors, etc...essentially ANY public figure [other than the politicians themselves and official news media personnel] who attempt to influence their following, however, large or small). Let's face it; the artists using their stage to influence their audiences are receiving the very same information (ad nauseam, if desired) via TV, radio, newspapers and internet as the audiences themselves. But, when they start interpreting that information for these audiences via political messages, creative or otherwise, the message they're really sending is that the audiences are obviously not intelligent enough to interpret the information for themselves. Regarding this I offer some very sage words of Rod Serling, "Whenever you write, whatever you write, never make the mistake of assuming the audience is any less intelligent than you are." Given there are indeed numerous fans of "political art," apparently these particular audiences don't take offense at blatant insults to their intelligence. I do.

And, for that reason, what such artists justify as "social concern" I see as something else... Arrogance. Or, as addressed in last month's "Molly Madness" column, Ego... which is even more appropriate in this case, as few things so completely awake in me the tendency to scream "E!" or make me want to "GO!" (as far away from the offending force as possible). Besides, (if these artists are truly concerned about society, perhaps they should go volunteer at a local soup kitchen... offer their art at nursing homes like this month's featured musician John Fratella, or become involved with non-political causes like curing cancer. Cliche though the adage may seem, even the smallest action really does speak louder than words.

Don't get me wrong. I am in no way advocating anarchy, denying artists or other public figures the right to their own opinions or saying that friends shouldn't be able to share their (however like or disparate) views on political topics of the day over dinner. I'm merely using my own public forum of this newsletter to express my individual opinion that art and politics shouldn't be mixed. Even if one doesn't buy into my conviction that art is a spiritual "calling," the practical matter of it being a tough way to make a living should provide its own mercenary incentive to avoid making things worse. Let's face it, in a country whose last two presidential elections pointed up the nearly equal division of Republicans and Democrats, either side you (are accurately or mis — construed to) take you know you're very likely cutting potential sales of your art in half. Is "expressing" your "social concern" (i.e. publicly flexing your ego) really worth that?

And, PLEASE, to any politically inclined artists reading this, don't start with the self-righteous spiel (may I again offer that word, "Ego") of how that doesn't matter when the issues being raised in our country are so important. Like I said before, we're all getting the same information via the same sources. And, if anyone truly *isn't* in capable of sorting all that out for him/herself, as far as I'm concerned, they're not fit to vote in the first place.

That said, the artists I consistently admire are those who keep their nose to the grindstone in attempting to change the world from the inside out through their work... and strive for the harmony and unity truly great art can achieve. As for outward politicizing, it's my firm belief that should be saved for the one place truly all men (and women) are created equal... a place we're all celebrities whose voices can be heard in equal measure: the voting booth. Speak there.

Outside it, however, I suggest you make just one mighty effort toward world peace — hold yours.

(What One Might Call) A Pet Peeves and Paranoia Rant

I actually wrote this for inclusion in a Christmas card to the people it introduces...who (thankfully!) enjoyed its intended humor immensely. As I had a bit of space left in this publication and wanted to share something on the lighter side to follow the more serious "rant" above, I thought I'd include it here. Hope you enjoy it, too!

A couple winters ago my husband, Andre, and I embarked on a road trip throughout the Midwest that included re-connecting with several friends and relatives we hadn't seen in many, many years — or in some cases, hadn't ever met at all. Among these was Andre's Uncle George, his cousin, Walter and cousin-in-law, Joan. And, in the course of that instinctive search for common ground that goes with making new acquaintances it was learned early in the visit that Cousin Walter and I share a common interest in writing — an interest in Cousin Walter's case he's turned into the modestly profitable enterprise of a syndicated column.

And, of course, given our common ink-driven pursuits, I was subsequently added to the mailing list of this weekly publication.

While that may sound innocent enough on the surface, there's one catch — Cousin Walter's column is about the great outdoors. Now, of course, that's not to imply I don't have a healthy appreciation for nature and its non-human occupants. And indeed I very much enjoyed the topics this column covered throughout the spring and summer — topics that included Joan's preferred outdoor pastime of leisurely walks, and a brief explanation of the ground-training exercises used to break Cousin Walter's new horse Roach (an acquisition necessitated by his prior month's persistent panic and resulting negative reactions to...wild turkeys? But I digress). In fact, I grew to enjoy these brief written diversions so much that I began looking forward to checking my inbox every Tues. evening at 9PM for the latest installment.

That is, I enjoyed them until summer began to ebb into fall and Cousin Walter's column likewise began to switch colors. Rather than the sunny, warm discussion of various light and breezy concerns, it became instead a darker, colder conflict-filled journal of his efforts toward one end — deer hunting.

But, before you start raising objections to my objection with that topic, let me just preface my own comments on the matter with the fact I've heard all of the arguments supporting this activity — the statistics of how the deer population would grow out that of humans in any given area in about a year, how many car accidents they cause annually, etc. etc. etc. It doesn't matter.

That said, somewhere around September, when such phrases as "bow and arrow" and "lined up my shot" began creeping more and more frequently into Cousin Walter's columns, I began awaiting every Tues. evening a bit less eagerly. And, as the weeks wore on and I realized the likelihood of some unutterable phrase describing a poor deer — uh, I mean *deer's* — demise might likewise be included, well, I ceased *actually* reading these potential casualty reports, and began instead scanning them warily while squinting through the slightly separated fingers of one hand squarely covering both eyes. And, of course, the inevitable column arrived in which I spotted something about "blood" and "down for food," and I must admit that once I read those words I feared my days of deriving anything approving pleasure from Cousin Walter's column had gone "down for good" as well.

But, never willing to give up without a fight (albeit invariably a bloodless one), I decided to persist in my resistance to the "delete" button and kept reading (or rather continued scanning through one eyed eyeing) as each new printed tale arrived. And, as of this writing, I'm sincerely glad I did. For, had I not done so, I'd have missed the beginnings of a wonderfully resounding comeback on the part of nature — including a torrential downpour that very nearly claimed the pickup Cousin Walter was forced to park in the creek, and more recently, the side-splitting depiction of a (far more literally than intended) gas-burning log-splitter. I can just picture the families of the deer taken by Cousin Walter and his pals witnessing these hapless misadventures with glee... and given their "steak" — uh, I mean "stake" in the matter, very likely a glee even greater than my own.

That said, yes, I admit I was encouraged during the many weeks leading up to an actual "kill" by the fact Joan had fixed a (truly exceptional) non-venison-inclusive dinner for our visit last winter. Having come into my Outdoors Column "subscription" well after last year's hunting season had passed, I was hopeful such "ill-fortune" as Cousin Walter recounted for much of this season had at that time resulted in a freezer full of supermarket-purchased-food like most civilized humans arguably rather than one filled with the evidence of skills possessably linking modern man far too closely with his caveman ancestor.

Of course, having conceived such thoughts to paper, now I can only hope Joan will still make us dinner at all.

Molly Madvises (now by Molly's neighbor Keela)

If you missed the announcement in the **December 2006** issue, as per the precedent set by *Dear Abby* which syndicated column **MOLLY** retained that title when passing to its originator's daughter, so this column will retain the name of its originator now that **Molly** has passed on. The "madvice" currently offered herein, therefore, is that of Keela, one of the "noisy neighbors" Molly spoke of frequently — and who you may have already met via the [photo collection](#) taken during her pregnancy and in the weeks after her *fifteen* babies were born. Needless to say, with that kind of experience, Keela, like Molly, knows a bit about life as learned by her adventures as a rodent single mom. Also like Molly, she has a strong mind of her own with much rat wisdom to the months. I hope you'll enjoy her commentary both now and in the future.

That said, on to this month's question...

Hi, Keela. Recently, on a grand outdoor adventure I met a fella who has done his fair share of rock climbing/mountaineering. As we chatted over hot beverages in the frosty air, he pointed out places in a nearby mountainside where you may feel that you're steady but which could actually place you in a precarious situation. Not long into his overview, complimented nicely with the right amount of the sport's jargon, like, "crimps," "anchors" and "Elvis" — that's when your leg starts to shake for various reasons, especially because you are scared out of your mind! — I realized that this was not something I ever want to try. Nonetheless, I was curious as to which was easier, making your way up or coming down. He said that your ascent and descent need to be treated with equal attention and care. He said that while it is important to stay focused on your goal of getting to the top, you also need to realize what comes next and be ready to take it on.

Sound advice, I thought. But, the *Elvis* still had my curiosity. I asked how you got out of it. He said that you simply take a deep breath or two and stop looking at the ground. It's so much about focus, he said, that it (focus) will get you to where you want to be.

What's your take on this view, Keela? Have you ever gotten to a place you wanted to be but then froze, in fear — or delight? "I have you ever had the "Elvis" take hold and not know how to "shake it"? Or maybe you have taken your next steps a little carelessly and unexpectedly stumbled, tripped over your tail on the way? What would you offer on how to move on to the next place you want to be?

Sh...Sh...Sh...Shaken On Slippery Slopes

Honestly, I don't think there was more than a minute in a rat's life that he or she isn't aware of the endless scary possibilities that might "come next"... although indeed the ways in which we each "take [these]" on sometimes differ greatly. I've already shared last month about my own tendency to squeal "Ee!" and "Let me GO!" in what I perceived to be a precarious situation. However, I think it "goes" without saying that kind of reaction may indicate I do know a little about getting into an "Elvis". The need for concentrated focus to get out of it, though... well, "there's the rub" as they say.

Thankfully, in my — uh, shaky state — I had a very patient adoptive mom and dad to help me... as I did at the only other time to even come close, which was when I had my babies a few weeks later. Of course, taking care of fifteen kids all at the same time might be considered an "Elvis"-inspiring situation all its own. But, again I had a fair bit of help... including wonderfully relaxing visits to the couch to re-charge my batteries.

That said, I've got to admit I've chewed on this question even longer and harder than last month's... which has made me even hungrier — and what's worse, this time around I can't even find a single way to relate the topic to my favorite subject — food!!!

To tell you the truth, the bulk of my life has been pretty much "Elvis"-free. But, to answer your question with something a bit more enlightened than "Not really" or "I don't know," I've tried to think of situations involving relatives or friends I might be aware of who have gone through more difficult times. And, of course, the one with the very most experience in this area would have to be the late, great Molly. I mean, what could possibly be a more textbook "Elvis" predicament than being caught alone and pregnant under a mailbox in a March snowstorm??? I can only imagine how hard it had to be to still her own shaking legs (which were surely shivering from just plain cold in addition to fear)... not to mention