

In Suburban Fringe, a humor column on STLtoday.com, writer Bob Rybarczyk takes the soul-crushing banality of suburban life and ingeniously reshapes it to seem humorously soul-crushing and banal. This book is a collection of the very best of the Fringe.

**The Cat Ate My Nachos: The Very Best of the Suburban Fringe**

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# The Cat Ate My Nachos:

## The Very Best of the Suburban Fringe

Chi Chi emerged from the bathroom. That was the good news. The bad news was that she was sobbing hysterically.

The worse news, as she then informed me, was that she'd spent her time in the bathroom throwing up.

Colette and I exchanged a wide-eyed look. Not good. And of all the rotten timing - I hadn't even gotten a single whiff of biscuits and gravy. Although, to be honest, the idea of country gravy had suddenly become slightly less appetizing in the wake of Chi Chi's news flash.

Colette shuffled the still-sobbing Chi Chi back into the bathroom. The rest of us stood in the gift shop, unsure of what to do next. Breakfast was definitely out of the question. I gathered up Gustavo and Melon Ball (not her real name) and told them the bad news.

Chi Chi and Colette came back out of the bathroom. Chi Chi looked pale and was still crying a little. Colette shrugged. "She didn't get sick in there," she said. "But she's really upset. I'm not sure what we should do."

I felt bad for poor little Chi Chi, who seemed a more than a little frightened by the entire experience. "Come on, let's get you home," I said as I picked her up to comfort her.

And then Chi Chi threw up on my face.

Yeah, that's right. My daughter threw up on my face.

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The characters and events in this book are (mostly) not fictitious. Any similarity to real persons or animals, living or dead, is unfortunate but probably accurate.

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# **The Cat Ate My Nachos:**

## **The Very Best of the Suburban Fringe**

**by Bob Rybarczyk**



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\*I suppose I could have listed out all the columns and their corresponding page numbers here, but man, that would have been a lot of work. You're awesome and all that, but come on, let's not get crazy. On the bright side, each column will now feel like a surprise. You're welcome.

# **A Whole Slew of Suburban Fringe Columns**

## **Seriously, dude, I do not want to chase your cat**

*Originally published June 8, 2004*

*Bob Says: It's funny to think about it now, but back in June of '04 I was not a Cat Guy. I am now – there are far too many columns in this book about the various cats that I've lived with the last several years – but in the summer of '04, cats were as alien to me as, well, aliens. This encounter really didn't help to raise my opinion of cats.*

*This story is also one of those odd incidents that seems to happen to me far more frequently than they happen to other people.*

So the other day I was walking over to the workout room at my apartment complex, and considering that it was about 5:40 a.m., I was fairly pleased that I was upright at all.

One of the reasons I like working out at the crack of dawn is that I usually get the room to myself. So when I approached the door to the workout room and saw a cat looking back at me through the glass, I hesitated.

Surely the cat wasn't there to work out. Cats don't work out. Right?

I assumed that perhaps the cat's owner was working out. Which was a drag. Not only was I going to have to share the workout room, but I also was going to have to share it with someone who actually brought a cat with him. Stoked, I was not.

The cat was sitting right in front of the door. I've never owned a cat, but I've been around them enough to know that this particular cat was simply waiting for some chump to open that door so it could bolt for freedom.

I wanted to jump at it from my side of the door so that it would flee and let me enter without risking a jailbreak. But it wasn't my cat. I didn't want to offend the owner by freaking out his tabby. So I just sorta lunged halfheartedly at it.

I was moderately successful. The cat ran back a few feet, having been intimidated by my display of superiority and aggression. Feeling superior and aggressive, I opened the door.

I swear, I never would have guessed that cat could move so fast.

I stood in the doorway, holding the door open, staring at the cat. It had bolted between my feet and was standing a few feet away from me. Outside.

"Um," I said, "here, kitty." I waved my hand in the universal "come on in" signal. I was not at all surprised to see the cat hold its ground, but hey, I had to try.

"Oh man, he let the cat out," said a voice.

No, I thought. The cat let itself out. I merely provided the opportunity.

The person who had blamed me for the cat's escape was wearing some kind of uniform, like maybe he was a maintenance guy or something. An older guy. Bald. And he was in the mood to give orders.

"Get him," he ordered.

Crap. I didn't want to pick up a cat I didn't know. For all I knew, it was one of those people-hating cats. If that guy were its owner, I would have understood why.

I approached the cat anyway. "Here, kitty," I said. It bolted.

Crap crap.

"Don't let it get away," spat Angry Maintenance Geezer. "That's a \$3,000 cat."

I stared at the man.

He wasn't joking.

Who brings a \$3,000 cat to a workout room? If I ever spend \$3,000 on a cat, I'm having it immediately stuffed so that I can make damn sure it never runs away.

The cat trotted into the parking lot. I walked after it. "Are you its owner?" I asked.

"No, he's working out."

Again, I stared. He was going to make me ask the obvious question. "Is he coming to help?"

"The guy's like 70 years old. Just grab the cat." I was starting to dislike Angry Maintenance Geezer.



I tried to catch the cat. I actually got my hands on it. It jumped away.

"Oh, come on," said the Geez. "Just [expletive] grab it!"

The cat had wandered close to the Geez. "*You* grab it!" I barked. I am not cheery at 5:45 a.m.

The Geez gave it a shot. The cat jumped out of his hands. I resisted the urge to point and say, "Ha!"

"He's having fun. He thinks this is a game," said a new voice. It was the owner. "Like 70 years old" was an optimistic estimate. "Oh, boy," he said. "I'll be out here all morning. The last time he got out, it took me six hours to catch him."

Six? Hours? I didn't have six hours. I didn't even have six minutes. I had to start getting ready for work.

"You go ahead with your workout," said Ancient Cat Man. "It's not your fault." I shot a look at Angry Maintenance Geezer, who clearly disagreed with any assessment that resolved me of blame.

"We'll just catch him by ourselves," said Cat Man. "We'll probably be out here until noon."

Great. Just what I need in my life: more guilt.

I left anyway. Severely disgruntled that I not only missed my workout, but that I also appeared to be some kind of cat-emancipating jerk, I walked back to my apartment.

The cat sprinted right past me. Behind him huffed Angry Geezer and Cat Man. Great. I'd been dismissed from the hunt on the grounds that I was working out. Instead, they saw me walking home. I kept my head down and went inside.

A ten-minute shower later, I opened the blinds in my living room. Sure enough, there was that damned cat, wandering on the lawn right outside. It was as though it wanted to make sure I was adequately taunted.

I heard the voices of the kitty-hunting posse and shut my blinds before they could see me. I realized that I was actually hiding from them. For the heinous crime of opening a door near a cat that had read a little too much Kerouac, I was reduced to hiding in my own apartment.

The whole thing was ridiculous. It's not like I kicked the dumb cat. I'd never kick any cat.

Well, except maybe one.

## **Wait...I'm the only dad at this birthday party?**

*Originally published July 27, 2004*

*Bob Says: Ahh, the joy of the awkward moment. If it weren't for awkward moments, I might not have moments at all. I like the schmaltzy ending of this one, too. Normally I hate schmaltz in all its forms, but when it's my own schmaltz, I don't mind it as much. In that way, schmaltz is a lot like kids and farts.*

So the other day I got a call from my daughter Gustavo (not her real name).

"Um, Daddy?" she started. It's always fairly entertaining when she starts a conversation that way. Usually it means she's going to ask a question that she's relatively certain I will answer with a no.

"I found an invitation in my bag, and it's Icelick's (not her real name) birthday, and, well, Chi Chi will have to go, too, and so you have to take us to Aqua Port for it, okay?"

I paused, attempting to reshuffle those words into a sentence that made sense. I failed. "Can I talk to Mommy?" I asked.

"Sure," she said in the manner of someone taking pride in a job well done.

"Yes?" said Mommy a moment later.

"I think Gustavo may have just asked me something. I'm really not sure."

"We were emptying her bag today, and she found an invitation to a birthday party for Icelick. It's tomorrow at Aqua Port. Gustavo wants you to take her, and we thought Chi Chi (not her real name) would like to go, since she loves that place."

Ahh. See, that I understood. I agreed to take them. All was well. Or so I thought.

The next day, Gustavo, Chi Chi and I headed to Aqua Port for birthday-oriented fun in the sun. Aqua Port is essentially a moist playground. It has waterslides, and fountains, and wading pools, and a lazy-river-thing. There isn't any water deeper than four feet to be found anywhere, but there are enough lifeguards to staff an invasion of Turkey. Since the majority of them are very tanned 19-year-old girls, I don't necessarily mind.

Hey, I may be a dirty old man, but at least I admit it. That's why God invented sunglasses. Now leave me alone.

Gustavo quickly found the group of girls, about a dozen strong, who were there for the birthday party. They were traveling around in a shrieking, giggling pack. I generally tried to stay out of their way. I neither shriek nor giggle.

Everyone played and splashed and shrieked for about a half hour. Then I noticed that the birthday girl's mom, whom I'll call Betty because I honestly have no idea what her name actually is, was gathering everyone for the birthday festivities. I hustled Chi Chi into a towel, grabbed Gustavo's gift, and headed to the table area.

The girls were all sitting at one table. Betty and a couple other moms were at another table. Thankfully, there were a few other dads there as well. One of them was obviously Icelick's dad, because he thanked me for coming a few times. I accepted his handshakes as though I'd had anything to do with the decision to attend.

One of the dads gave his daughter a hug and left, telling the child he'd be back to pick her up later.

Pizza was served. I like pizza. I ate most of Chi Chi's slice. She's easily distracted.

Another dad left.

Giant cookie was served. Chi Chi paid more attention to her piece of giant cookie than she had to her pizza. Fortunately, there was extra, and I snagged a piece of my own.

Icelick's dad came by to thank me again and said he'd catch me later. Something didn't seem right about that.

I looked around quickly. *Oh no*, I thought. *No no no no*.

I was the only dad still there. My wingmen had left me. The party consisted of a dozen pre-teen girls, a few moms, and yours truly. I hadn't planned on doing the old dump-and-bolt move. Not that I would have anyway, because these days I don't miss time with my daughters for anything, but still.

Icelick started opening her presents. She got some makeup, and some pajamas, and a couple gift certificates. Betty was genuinely excited, as were the other moms. I felt like an ostrich at a fashion show.

I asked Chi Chi if she wanted to go swimming. "No," she said. "I want to see the presents."

Gustavo heard me. "No, Daddy, you can't go swimming," she said. "I want you to stay up here."

Dang. I stayed put.

Icelick opened a purse. Betty, sensing my discomfort, jokingly winked at me as she said, "Wow, what a great purse!" I appreciated the effort, but I was still the hockey player at the ballet recital.

I'm 35, have a good job, own a car, have bought two houses, and have fathered two children, but put me at a poolside birthday party with a bunch of small girls and their moms, and I feel like a 12-year-old who doesn't know the answer to the math question and is praying the teacher doesn't call his name.

I sat, watched the party, and tried to say as little as possible. I wondered if the other dads were in a bar somewhere, having a beer and watching the Cards game.

Chi Chi was a little cold, so I wrapped her in her towel and sat her on my lap. She rested her head on my shoulder while keeping an eye on the festivities.

Then Gustavo got up from the table where all the other girls were sitting so she could sit right next to Chi Chi and me. I wasn't sure why she did that.

"Everything okay?" I asked.

"Yep," she said. She rested her head on my arm and continued eagerly watching the present-opening ceremonies.

I looked at my daughter for a moment. And I decided she was right.

## **Adventures in manscaping**

*Originally published August 10, 2004*

*Bob Says: I don't get much hate mail any more (which is kind of a bummer; I love hate mail), but there have been a few themes in the nastygrams I have received over the years. One is that my writing sucks. That's obvious; I'm no Herman Melville. Probably the second most frequent theme I get is that people think I'm gay. I'm not, but I get sort of a perverse thrill at taunting stupid people into thinking I am. I don't necessarily set out to do this, but when, say, the notion of writing a column about body waxing pops into my head, I don't shy away from it out of fear that people might think I've set up camp in the closet or something.*

*I will admit that I was a little embarrassed to tell this story. It's one thing to taunt stupid people; it's quite another to walk into work and have coworkers chuckle at you because they now know you have a hairy back.*

I generally take pride in my appearance. I shower daily, iron my shirts, clip my fingernails, that sort of thing. I'm not a fanatic about it, but I try to at least avoid being offensive. I like to set my goals high.

That said, when Colette recently looked at my eyebrows and said, "Those definitely need to be cleaned up a bit...have you ever thought about having those waxed?", I was taken aback. Like, way aback. Waxing? Me? I'm not the waxing type. I burp and scratch and drink beer, sometimes simultaneously. I've seen guys get things waxed on some of those makeover shows, like "Queer Eye" or "What Not To Wear," and some of those dudes were considerably more lumberjack-ish than me, but still.

"My sister could do it," Colette offered. "While we're at it, she can get that patch on your lower back. What do you think?"

Good gravy. We weren't just talking about waxing. She was inquiring about full-fledged manscaping.

Had the request come from anyone else, I'd have most certainly laughed, then scrambled to grab a beer and drink it while burping and scratching. But Colette and I have been dating for a few months, and she clearly knows quite a bit about personal appearance, so I put my considerable reservations aside and said I'd let her sister de-fur me, if for no other reason than to have

something else to tell stories about over beers with friends. Um, or not.

I wasn't sure what to think about the whole thing. While I had to admit that the small patch of fur on my lower back was a bit unsightly, I'd never really thought my eyebrows needed tweaking. I'd never really thought about my eyebrows at all. They didn't bother me, and I didn't bother them. We had an understanding.

Apparently, I'd been getting shafted by my scruffy eyebrows for years. Who knew?

A few days later, the time had come. As I drove to Colette's mom's house, where the hair-yanking extravaganza was to take place, I felt as though I were approaching a point of no return. Once a guy has been manscaped, there's no going back. From there, it's a short trip to using eye creams and getting chemical peels and being mocked in Miller High Life commercials. I involuntarily scratched something.

Not only were Colette and her sister, Michelle, there, but so was Colette's mom and 7-year-old daughter, Melon Ball (not her real name). Four females in the house, and I was the one getting waxed. In my defense, my girlfriend is really pretty, and she was smiling at me. If you're a guy, you're probably nodding in an "I understand, my brother" kind of way right about now. Either that, or you're pointing and laughing. Maybe both.

"You ready?" Colette asked with a sympathetic smile.

"Bring it on," I said in my manliest manner.

I laid down on the couch. It was covered by a sheet. That made me a little nervous. When mob folks want to whack a dude, they sit him on a couch with a sheet on it. I laid back anyway.

Michelle entered with her gear. My eyes were drawn to the small tub of wax. It looked evil. Like, if Darth Vader sold wax, that's what it would look like.

I closed my eyes while she dabbed hot wax on my left eyebrow. I was proud of myself for not yelping. Not that I'd admit to it if I had yelped. Besides, I don't yelp. I may shriek, or even holler, but I don't yelp. I'm sure of it.

Michelle pressed a small tab of paper over the wax, then, without warning or even counting to three, yanked it off.

And ya know, it wasn't too bad. I felt a bit manly about my pain tolerance. The irony of that feeling was entirely lost on me at the time.

Michelle waxed and yanked another part of my left eyebrow. Again, I took it like, well, like a man, I suppose.

She moved to right eyebrow. I was feeling like an old pro. I was cocky. Wax on. Wax off.

OW.

My eyes watered. I squinted. I grimaced. You will note that at no time did I yelp.

"That one was the bushier of the two," Michelle said. "Look at this - no wonder it hurt." She showed me the strip of paper. It was littered with hair that, until very recently, had been resting comfortably above my right eye. It was like looking at a battlefield after the smoke has cleared. I resisted the urge to salute the poor little bastards.

"You okay?" Colette asked. She was still smiling, but in a concerned way, as if she feared that I might sprint for the door at any second.

Like Tom Cruise in "Top Gun," I gave her a thumbs-up. Manly, baby.

It was time to do my lower back. I rolled over and tried not to think about the fact that my girlfriend and her family were intently studying one of the least-attractive parts of my body.

"See how the hair is growing in three different directions?" Michelle said.

"Oh yeah, wow," Colette said.

"Can I see? Can I see?" Melon Ball said.

I wondered what it would be like to play linebacker in the NFL, or maybe man the tail-gunner position in a B-52.

Michelle applied the wax, pressed the paper onto my skin, and yanked. Somewhere in the city, an evil person chuckled and didn't know why.

I was done.

I asked Colette what she thought of the new brows. "I like them," she said. "Go take a look."

I looked in the bathroom mirror. Where there had been scruffy edges, there were now straight lines. My eyebrows almost looked

like they'd been drawn on my head. Between that and the puffy redness from the waxing, I looked slightly Vulcan.

"Give it a few days," Colette said. "You'll get used to it."

"So what happens when the waxed hair starts coming back?" I asked.

"I'll tweeze them for you," she said. "It'll be painful at first, but you'll get used to it."

Oy.

Maybe I should learn to yelp after all.



## **Tales of the tallest second-grader ever**

*Originally published August 31, 2004*

The other day I met my daughter Gustavo (not her real name) for lunch at school. I had a day off and thought it would be fun to get a glimpse of what second grade is like these days.

Gustavo had taken a packed lunch to school with her, but I decided to surprise her by bringing fast food. Well, OK, that's not entirely true. My original plan had been to see if cafeteria pizza is still as bland and rectangular as it was when I was a kid. But Gustavo's mom had suggested to me that morning that Gustavo would get a kick out of it if I brought fast food.

She also pointed out that Gustavo's school didn't serve pizza every day, and when they did, it wasn't the same rectangular garbage for which I was so inexplicably nostalgic. She looked at the menu and told me that I had a choice of chicken nuggets or a peanut butter sandwich.

So yeah, fast food it was.

Upon arriving at school, I picked up my visitor's pass - a pink sticker so bright that it probably attracted the attention of alien species on distant planets - and waited for Gustavo in the hall by the cafeteria. Another class of second-graders was already in the hall. I got this strange feeling that they were all looking at me. I looked down at their small, absorbent faces. Sure enough, they were all looking at me. Yes, children, Gulliver is here, and he brought junk food.

Gustavo's class came into the hall. She saw me and waved. She saw the food and started jumping up and down.

Vittles 1, Daddy 0.

I gave Gustavo a hug and said hello. "Daddy," she said, gesturing to a boy standing next to her, "this is Mandible (not his real name). He's the funniest boy I know."

Mandible 1, Daddy 0.

"Hi, Mandible," I said. I expected him to do something funny.

"Hi," he said. And that was it. I wondered if maybe I just didn't get his style of humor.

Gustavo and I went into the cafeteria. As I pulled our food out of the bag and set it on a table, I noticed that Mandible was standing a few feet away. Gustavo saw him, too. "Hi, Mandible," she said.

"Are those chicken rings?" he asked Gustavo. "I love chicken rings."

"Yeah, they are, but they're all mine," Gustavo said.

"Aw," Mandible replied. He left.

"He's the funniest boy I know," Gustavo said as she dug into her cheese fries.

Mandible 2, Daddy 0.

The two of us ate and chatted for a while. It was nice. I gathered up our trash and got ready to leave.

"Daddy, come to recess with me," Gustavo said. Visions of 25 second-graders climbing on me, chasing me around, and telling me that Jimmy Joe isn't sharing the swing, all in 90-degree heat, filled my head.

"Don't you want to play with your friends?" I asked.

"Yeah, but I want you to play with us."

I tried to think of a reasonable excuse, failed, and consented to attending recess.

All the second-graders in the cafeteria lined up, waiting to go outside. Gustavo started talking to a friend. I put my hands in my pockets and waited.

"Does my breath smell?" a boy near me asked. He breathed in my direction.

"Yes," I lied.

"I knew it," he said.

Another boy breathed into his own hand and smelled it. "My breath smells like onions!" he said.

The first boy said, "I ate nachos for lunch yesterday, then had nachos from 7-11 for dinner. Two nachos in one day."

I really wasn't sure what to say. "Congratulations," I suggested.

A teacher blew a whistle to get everyone's attention. She announced that due to the heat, the school would have "inside recess" that day.

"What's 'inside recess?'" I asked Gustavo.

"We play in our classrooms instead of outside."

Sweet. Kids in classrooms shriek less frequently than they do outdoors. We filed out of the cafeteria, 25 second-graders and one six-foot-five doofus.

In the classroom, Gustavo showed me her desk, and all her markers, and her books. It was cute. The books in particular made me really glad I'm not still in the second grade. I just don't think I'd be sufficiently challenged.

Gustavo decided she and her friend Liaison (not her real name) wanted to sit under the teacher's desk and draw pictures.

"She allows you to do that?" I asked. I may as well have asked if they wanted to shave a monkey; by the time I opened my mouth, the two of them had scampered under the desk. I followed them and sat in the teacher's chair, since she hadn't come back to the room yet.

A boy ran up to me. "Can you tell Blippity (not her real name) to let me use the computer?" he asked. "I was using it first, and she started using it."

"Um...I'm not your teacher," I stammered.

He stared at me. "I was using it first," he repeated.

"I'm just here with Gustavo," I said. "I'm her Daddy."

The boy stared some more. I stared back. Time passed. He went away.

Daddy 1, Troubled Kid 0.

After a couple more minutes, the teacher entered the room. I was still sitting in her chair, and Gustavo and her friend were still under the desk. I felt totally busted. But the teacher just waved and said hello to me. Apparently having kids under her desk was par for the course. Teachers live weird lives.

Gustavo's teacher announced that it was time to head over to the computer lab to do whatever it is that kids do in computer labs. I figured that was my cue to go.

Gustavo gave me a hug and a goodbye kiss, and I was off. I'd had a great time, and I can't wait to visit again, but I was oddly relieved to be leaving. I'd felt like an outsider, an interloper in a universe I didn't fully understand.

Not for the first time, I was glad I'm not an elementary school teacher. But that's OK. I think the elementary schools are a little better off that way.

## **Golf isn't a game - it's a curse**

*Originally published September 28, 2004*

I hate golf.

No, really. I hate it. And there's actually a really good reason why I hate it. You see, golf reminds me of every single inadequacy in my life, all at once.

Golf requires athletic talent and coordination. I have little athletic talent (and that "little" consists of being tall enough to be mediocre at basketball and volleyball) and no coordination.

Golf requires money, of which I have, well, not nearly enough to afford golfing.

Golf requires patience. If I'm put on hold for more than five seconds, I start surfing the web to kill the time.

Golf requires good sportsmanship and the ability to graciously accept a poor performance. I once threatened to leave a poker party because I'd lost three dollars in a single hand.

So naturally I went golfing last week.

It wasn't my fault. I had to go golfing. One of my clients was hosting a charity golf tournament. (For those who are new to this column, I write it on the side; by day, I'm a nerd at a public-relations agency.) The agency bucked up for a sponsorship and got to enter a foursome. I was one of the four.

I had mixed feelings about the outing. On one hand, it was an opportunity to trade a day at the office for a day on a golf course. On the other hand, it was freakin' *golf*. If I didn't already have an arch-enemy, my arch-enemy would be golf.

I don't own a set of clubs. I don't see the point. I'm 6'5". Even if I just wanted a set to have in the event of client-sponsored charity tournaments, I'd have to buck up for custom-length clubs. I'd be out \$1,000 just so I could more effectively suck at golf.

The last two times I'd gone golfing, I was so bad, and lagged so many strokes behind the people with which I was playing, that eventually I gave up. I took the Ride Of Shame, sitting in the cart for the last three or four holes. When you're happy about scoring a 12 on a par-4, you know you're playing the wrong sport.

As I took to the course last week, I'll admit, I was nervous. I had no hopes of suddenly unleashing my inner Vijay Singh, but I

also didn't want to humiliate myself. I was in a foursome with a couple of my coworkers. Not that people cower in fear when I walk the halls at work, but I at least like to know that they aren't pointing and snickering after I walk by. Which makes me reconsider my decision to write that recent column about waxing my eyebrows, but whatever.

I approached the first tee hoping that maybe I'd somehow be a little bit better than the last time. That's all I hoped for. That wasn't too much to ask, was it?

Hell yeah it was.

I took a mighty swing with the driver I borrowed from one of my coworkers, whom I'll call Dave, since that's his name. I swung with all the confidence in the world. I tried to be the ball.

And that ball sailed, oh, about 30 feet.

Fortunately, the tournament was a scramble, which means that after all four players swing, only the best of the four shots counts. I could hit 10-foot drives all day long without damaging my team's chances. Ironically, it also meant that if I didn't hit a single good shot all day, my participation would be entirely without purpose.

My other coworker, whom I'll call Marc since that's his name, tried to keep me focused. "You've got at least one good drive in you today, man," he said.

I laughed, because I knew Marc was wrong.

As it turned out, I didn't have a good drive in me that day. Not a one. I actually hit the ball backwards while teeing off on one hole. I want you to think about that for a moment. Backwards. I'm not joking. Late in the day, I started missing the ball entirely.

"The wheels have come off," Marc said jovially. I laughed, because I knew Marc was right.

My dobber was definitely down. I told myself that this would be the last time I ever played golf. I'd have to figure out a way to get through the rest of my career without getting roped into client-related golf outings. My hatred of golf grew deeper roots and built itself a nice little condo.

I had told Dave earlier in the day that my only goal for the day was to sink one measly putt for the team. It was a modest goal, especially since the team always let me putt first. (That way the better players could get a read on the green while I missed the hole. But hey, at least I was serving a purpose beyond comic relief.)

After 14 holes, I hadn't sunk a single putt. Fourteen misses in a row. On hole 15, our team's ball ended up in the fringe, about 15 feet away from the hole. A tough shot - putting through fringe-length grass is tricky. I stepped up, took my gratuitous whack at the ball...and sunk that bastard.

My coworkers were perhaps more astounded than I was. High-fives were exchanged. Cheers were bellowed. It was almost as if I'd burped up a Playboy bunny. I finally had had my moment of glory, my minor contribution to the team for the day. I was pleased.

When we reached the green on the next hole, our lie was even worse. We were once again in the fringe, but this time the ball lay a good 50 feet from the hole. And the green slanted to the left. And it was uphill. A nigh-impossible shot. Marc stood about four feet to the right of the hole. "Hit it at my feet," he said. I laughed. As if I had the ability to aim a golf shot.

I looked at the hole, looked at Marc's feet, and swung.

"Dang," I said. "Not even close."

"I don't know," Dave said. "That shot looks good."

I looked again. The shot was going straight at Marc's feet.

"It's got a chance," Marc said.

It bent toward the hole.

"No way," Dave said.

It kept on rolling.

I raised my arms and held the putter high. "IT'S IN THE HOLE!" I yelled.

I laughed, because I knew I was right.

In Suburban Fringe, a humor column on STLtoday.com, writer Bob Rybarczyk takes the soul-crushing banality of suburban life and ingeniously reshapes it to seem humorously soul-crushing and banal. This book is a collection of the very best of the Fringe.

**The Cat Ate My Nachos: The Very Best of the Suburban Fringe**

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