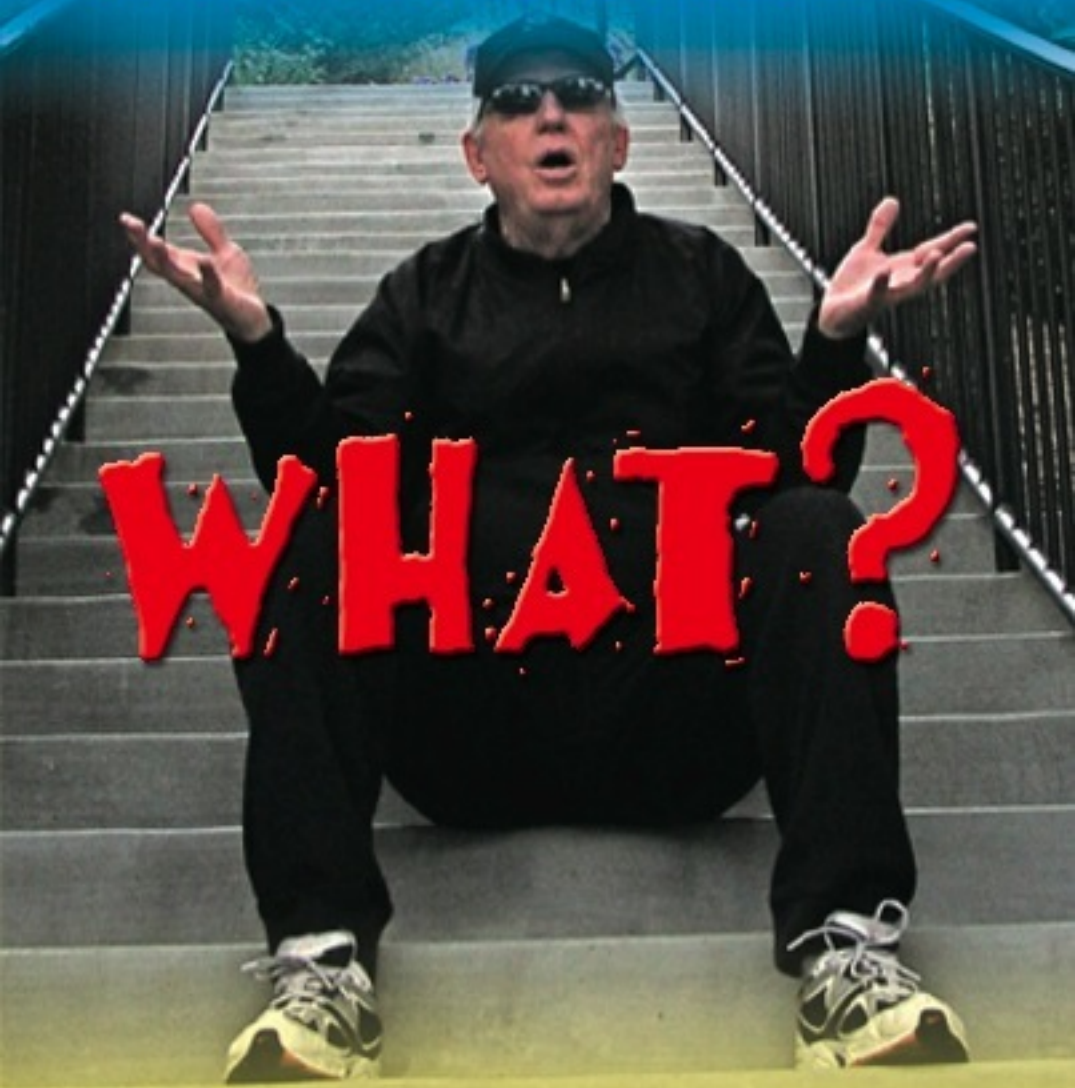
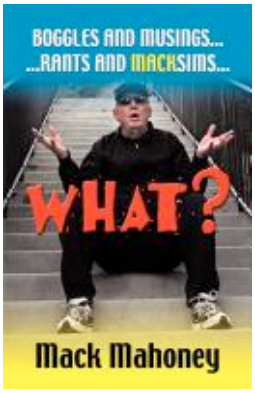
BOGGLES AND MUSINGS...
...RANTS AND MACKSIMS...



Mack Mahoney



QUESTIONS THIS BOOK ANSWERS What's the difference between men and women? What's life really like on a nuclear submarine? What's the truth about the energy crisis? Is there is a God? Are women more courteous than men? How does one accumulate wealth? Who are twelve people you won't meet in Heaven? What are the biggest mistakes you can make? What's the truth about body piercing? What can happen on a sidewalk? Are human real?

WHAT?

Boggles and Musings… Rants and Macksims

“What”?

Boggles - Musings - Rants – Macksims

by

Mack Mahoney

Mack Mahoney

“What”? is a
Mack Mahoney book

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MY THING

It seems as if everyone has a "Thing" nowadays. You know, some essential enterprise that they make their own. I must admit that for most of my life I was "Thingless." It's not like I didn't have any serious interests or hobbies. I've had some terrific jobs that I took lots of pride in, including my Naval career. But they were jobs—not a Thing. I've always been a compulsive reader and sort of a fanatical movie-savant, having dedicated much of my life relishing practically every film ever made. I can count on no fingers all the Lakers games I've missed the last thirty years. I've also invested tons of time in creative writing and I have seldom missed my daily bike ride for the last twenty years.

But I never actually had a successful "Thing." Not that I didn't want one. I always wanted to do something remarkable—something so unusual or challenging that I could be proud of the deed. This is about my achievement and the finding of my "Thing." I don't mean to boast like the fellow from Texas that I am, but I can't help it and after I reveal my particular accomplishment, I cordially invite anyone who wishes to duplicate it to feel free to do so.

So what is this "Thing" that I have mastered that I am so proud of? It all began quite innocently, turned into a modest hobby, grew into a total commitment and eventually became such an obsession that it has now become my "Thing"— which I do by force of habit. It is now such a part of me, it helps me be who I am.

I know—you must be wondering what in the Sam Hill I am talking about. I beg your patience as I try to explain. I suppose I could blame it on love, because that's kind of how it all began. It started a couple of decades ago when I began buying love cards for my darling—that is romantic greeting cards or cards with some sort of inspirational message, all to impress my

Peetie—at that time my recently acquired significant other. It wasn't my first dance—but I quickly discerned that it would be my best.

At first it was easy. Every morning, along with coffee, I'd present her with another card. Each of them brought a smile to her face, and I am an absolute sucker for smiles. I'd walk a mile to get a smile any day—especially from her. I loved pleasing her. But alas, after a couple of months there were no more cards available in the card shops. I'd used them all up. A panic started to develop. What could I do to replace that moment of pleasure I'd been giving her daily?

The light bulb of inspiration flicked on. I'd create a few cards myself—just to keep the good vibes going. I mean, how hard could it be? I'd always been sort of a handy dude with words, and, although I'd never seriously undertaken any great art projects, I did like doodling and had generally stayed within the lines when coloring.

I had always been a sort of night owl, doing my best work late at night. Initially, I took it easy. You know—some hearts and a few flowers—with a sentimental thought of some kind of hastily sketched out in my office on a piece of blank paper after she had retired for the night. It worked. The morning smiles kept coming.

Bit by bit, my little sketches began to resemble actual cards like one might see in a store. The hobby began to take shape as I slowly began to accumulate some actual card stock, along with plenty of water colors, a wide variety of colored pencils, artists brushes, acrylic paints, felt tip pins in all colors and sizes, and all the various tools of the trade needed to create handmade greeting cards.

The story gets a little unbelievable about here. I began buying art books, or checking them out from the library and

doing more and more difficult creations. It didn't take me long to become a fanatic.

Within a few months I was obsessively working the wee hours, often for several hours on each card. I utilized every possible media except oil paints, which took far too long to dry to be practicable for such purposes. I began experimenting with color washes to create instant backgrounds. I learned how to mix colors, and paint pine trees in one stroke with a certain brush. I mastered countless artistic tricks to speed up my work while constantly striving to make it look better. I developed many different speed-painting techniques, which allowed me to swiftly create a small 8 X 10 or 8 X 13 original illustration or painting on card stock every night.

By the time I had done about a hundred paintings, I began writing a poem to go with each one in a theme to the subject of the art. The artwork served as my muse. I'd never written poetry before, but it seemed to come together. The poems flowed into my head like God had created me just for that purpose.

I did paintings using every kind of artistic technique I discovered. I tried it all. There were paintings of nature scenes, of flowers, animals, monuments and people. I think I took a stab at my version of just about every painting the famous masters ever made regardless of whether it was impressionistic, modern, cubist, or a cartoon. Each card was a small painting that some folks thought to be worthy of framing, but I faithfully folded it and added the rhyme and usually another smaller illustration of a similar vein on the opposite side. I used watercolors, pen and ink, charcoals, magic markers, felt tipped pens, acrylic, crayon, colored pencils and whatever other medias I could devise to create the cards.

Night after night, rain or shine, in sickness and in good health (thank goodness I was seldom ever ill), at home or on vacation, without fail, for over ten years—I painted and created

a nightly "morning card" with an accompanying poem for my Peetie.

Then, unfortunately thanks to father time, old uncle arthritis began to kick in and my right (painting) wrist began to ache from all those hours of brush strokes. I realized the end of my obsessive artistic creations was approaching. Then, just as I was beginning to think fate was going to end my card creating compulsion, I got my first digital camera. Problem solved.

I thus began taking pictures and writing my usual 16-line poem. By the way, all of my poems rhyme and have some metaphorical or cogent message—like this:

On my cards all poems must rhyme
Each one and every time
And there has to be a sort of meter
No other lover has done it neater

It is the way that I persist
Absent it I feel I've missed
I do it now with innate ease
For the one I need to please

And so this challenge I fulfill
I do it thusly and always will
Because I make no compromise
My rhyme must shine in Peetie's eyes

I provide this example to illustrate a typical poem on my cards. Of course, the rhythm and spirit varies with each card. To my way of thinking any poem that don't rhyme is prose. I know technically I'm wrong on that point, but I'm stubborn. That's well over 100,000 lines or I'd immodestly estimate about a million words of poetry and still ticking. You might be thinking "how difficult could it be to create a small painting (actually it

is two small paintings, since there is one on both the front and the back side of each card) and write a meaningful (generally romantic or life-enhancing) sixteen-line rhyming poem every day. I suggest you try it for a few months. You might discover that without proper enthusiasm the paintings won't cut the mustard and that a good poem must flow from inspiration or it don't flow at all. If I appear to be too self-promoting and grandiose here, please forgive me and remember that it is ***my thing***!

Nowadays I continue creating Peetie's daily card, mostly with pictures I have taken, and processed through my computer. Every once in a while I do the artwork, just to keep my heart in it. As I write this, she has over 8,000 and is still counting—a new one every day.

Each card has been presented to my darling, folded with a crease in it, regardless of the quality of the painting. They express the joy of our relationship and tell the story of our togetherness. They are singularly interesting and in total, a remarkable accomplishment, even if I do say so myself.

An interesting side-aspect of these cards is that when I show more than a few of them to people they tend to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume. Most people simple do not have the inability to concentrate on many of them at a time. I have discovered that this is a reasonable reaction and that if I show someone only a small sampling they can comprehend and appreciate them much more than marveling at the insurmountable collection as a whole.

The cards have been unfolded and are currently maintained with protective covers in binders that are kept in a display case in my home. They have been scanned, organized and catalogued on my computer. They are the "world's largest collection of original hand made greeting cards". If you would like to see a small sampling of some of my card art, poetry, and photographs

you are invited to visit my website at "mackmahoney.com" and check them out for yourself. There are some pictures of the cards and more information. On the website you will be able to print your own free cards, or send free E-cards with only a few clicks. There are no membership fees, login requirements or passwords needed.

And now that you know, I invite any of you romanticists and would-be gallants out there to feel free to go ahead and duplicate my "Thing" if you feel the urge. Just remember that I've had a 23-year head start on you and I am still turning out a card a day for my Peetie.

LET'S TALK SEX

The battle of the sexes is a long-standing struggle with very few clear victories. Men seem predisposed to promiscuity while most females tend to be somewhat picky about who they bed down with.

No one really knows if Homo sapiens have always been faithful. One theory being floated around in the scientific community these days is that our ancient prime-evil (pun intended) ancestors were monogamous. Some scientists believe this to be true because they have been able to compare the size of bones and determined that primitive males were not much larger in stature than primitive females. Ergo—they deduced that early man was monogamous, because in non-monogamous societies males are predominately larger than females.

One thing is for sure. We're not all exactly monogamous these days. Aside from all the playing around, there are actually some cultures where wives take on several husbands at once. In certain areas of Africa and Utah the reverse is true. Many cultures that pretend to be monogamous have avuncular loopholes; a kid's parental authority is the mother's brother, purely because he's the nearest adult male who is known to actually be the child's blood relative

The animal kingdom is a virtual carnival of carnality. In fact, begetting among creatures of nature is infinitely complex. There are millions of species of mammals, animals, birds, reptiles, fish, and insects on this planet. A little careful observation reveals that there is every conceivable arrangement in matters of propagation. The methods and processes are limitlessly varied—with factors like estrus, breeding seasons, etc. It's all downright beastly.

All kinds of creatures conduct courtship. Most people know that birds do all sorts of weird things to attract mates. But did

you know that a fiddler crab waves his big brightly colored claw as he boogies for the lady of his choice? Many male spiders pour out their hearts and desires by dancing and pirouetting in intricate fashion. Have you ever observed a male scorpion take the female scorpion's little hands in his big ones and gently walk backward, pulling her to his chosen place for romance? Crayfish in love grunt a form of serenade by rubbing their feelers against their beak while male lobsters snap their fingers when they're in the mood.

The animal world proves that males are not by nature monogamous. Take the Pupfish: an ugly little species who breed with frenzy. They live in a stream where the population fluctuates dramatically. When females are scarce, the males hunt down a mate and swim by her side in a faithful monogamous manner. When the population increases and there is a surplus of females, the males puff out their fins and stake out a territory on the river bottom, performing little dances to attract the females who drop by to lay their eggs.

Females too, have their eccentricities. Female elk are known to copulate with many different males in the same day. We all know what black widow spider ladies do to their male lovers after they've been satisfied. Perhaps you've also watched a female praying Mantis dine on her conjugal partner's head afterward.

Practically all primates are promiscuous. As anyone who has ever visited a zoo can testify—monkeys often copulate like… well, monkeys.

Do you think human beings have the monopoly on transsexualism? If so, you are wrong. Should the male shrimp population in an area grow scarce enough to threaten the survival of the species thereabouts, some of the females simply turn into males. A neat trick huh? Or how about the feat of the hyena where all little ones, regardless of their sex, sport a male

penis until they mature at which time the females mysteriously manage to lose theirs. Conversely, all Sheepshead fish are born as females and in response to triggers us mammals do not understand, some of them turn into males.

Among thousands of bees, there is always only one Queen, who exists for the purpose of producing progeny, most of which are females, with only a few developing into males. The Queen bee is the only female to mate and she does it in the air with many different males, in a very brief time during which, she acquires sufficient spermatozoa to produce all the progeny she will engender during her life. She can lay more than 200 eggs a day. From that time on, whether they are workers, baby sitters, guards or pollen gatherers, all the bees are there to serve their queen. They have no sex life at all. And you thought you had it bad.

The albatross, in addition to being the largest seabird with a wingspan up to eleven feet, has a terrible sex life. They spend all their time at sea and come to land only to breed. They are kind of like sailors. Egrets, on the other hand, choose their nesting site and enjoy a lengthy four or five-day honeymoon period. They spend countless hours in intertwined ecstasy, cuddling their long supple necks together in a true "lovers knot".

The bull fur seals gather at their Alaska breeding grounds and wait for the cows, which have migrated three thousand miles just for their meet and greet time. After that swim, one can't blame those cows for only wanting to party down with the heartiest, biggest and most popular bulls.

In reptiles and amphibians, all parenting is done on a catch as catch-can basis. There are some creatures that are sexual catastrophes. The male octopus for example, doesn't have a penis. Instead, he grasps his little packet of sperm in a tentacle and shoves it down the female's breathing siphon. Naturally she

responds by trying to tear him apart. Sometimes their mating ritual becomes so violent that the female literally rips the male's tentacle off his body after the sperm has been delivered. Lucky for him it grows back. No humans can do that trick.

Some creatures that are supposedly monogamous are not. Like swans, who most people think mate for life. Many other birds are prone to having affairs. In fact, studies reveal that among songbirds, only one egg in three is actually sired by the nest mate. Sadly, birds can't file paternity suits or check DNA.

Both cowbirds and the clever cuckoo skip all the fuss and lay their eggs in the nest of other more domestic birds, leaving the involuntary host to rear their young. Unfortunately, the larger cuckoo and cowbird hatchlings will either starve, boot out of the nest, or just destroy any other hatchlings or eggs in the nest. Miraculously the hoodwinked foster parents never seem to notice and raise the ugly chicks, each of them probably thinking it comes from the other one's side of the family.

Opossums, or "possums" to you southerners, are prolific breeders. Thirteen days after the consummation of their marital vows, the female gives birth to as many as fifty-six young. There is a somewhat serious problem though, since she only has thirteen nipples. Only those strong enough to latch on to one will survive.

Sex is a powerful attractant. The female emperor moth has a scent gland that disperses her aroma so males can find her from a distance of three miles away. Sex is also music to many lusty creature ears. Male crickets aren't singing for the fun of it. A female lingering nearby will keep him in tune and if she likes his song she will eat some ambrosia-like substance out of a cupcake gland just behind the joints of his wing. When she gets full—their nuptials take place.

Sex in the sea is often less than thrilling. The sex of sea urchins is indistinguishable, but miraculously both males and

females reach their maturity simultaneously. When the magic moment arrives, the females liberate their secretions at the same time the males are setting their seaman semen free. Their primitive orgy elixir is married by the oscillation of ocean currents and fertilization occurs haphazardly. It was nice knowing you.

Talk about self-abuse. Starfish multiply by schizogenesis. That's a fancy word meaning they literally divide themselves into two halves, which will each subsequently reconstruct the other half to make two starfishes. That's really tricky. And we all know what happens to salmon after they spawn. Eeech!

I guess the "king of reproduction" award would have to go to the plain old Cottontail Rabbit. They get the job done the good old-fashioned way… but they do it very often. For example, if a female's broods all lived and reproduced, after five years she would have established an empire of two and a half million bunnies. And that's a lot of fur.

'THE SYNERGY OF ENERGY'

Though I make no claim to be an energy expert or any kind of transportation authority, I am a licensed automobile driver, which highly qualifies me to drill up some sardonic observations on the gooey side of the oil story. There are two sides to every controversy, and this is the dipstick side of the energy mess.

Many people are wondering why gasoline pump prices apparently have no stability and why they've been wildly yoyo-ing recently. There appears to be no top or bottom. Plunging prices don't bother most of us, but when they soar, drivers think it costs too much and pundits think we (mankind) need to get off oil—that in order to sustain our way of life we must become *energy impendent*. They rant about mine fields and wakeup calls and personal sacrifices that must be made. It is true—because we have become a **too-fatted calf** that must be weaned.

Speaking of fatted calves—do you recall why the Department of Energy was created? Not many people do. We have spent hundreds of billions of dollars supporting an agency and nobody even knows what it is for. Back in 1977 when it was established everyone thought it very appropriate, because it was to lesson our dependence on foreign oil. Here we are all these years later and the budget for the DOE is about 25 billion a year. They have over 16,000 federal employees and approximately another 100, 000 contract employees.

Indeed there are some hard choices in our future. It has become obvious that in spite of political rhetoric and chest thumping, oil prices march to their own drummer. They go up and down in strange ways, particularly nowadays. But regardless of ups and downs, it is the magic elixir and we must have it, and we're about to pass the point of no return, where demand exceeds supply. Alas, we cannot and do not, control enough black gold to quench our thirst. We're no longer the

only game in town. We are only 4.5% of the world's population, using about 25% of the world's oil. We have about 20% of the global economy. The most populated country in the world—China, with 1.3 billion people or four times the population of the United States—is already the number-two economy in the world and the number-two consumer of gasoline. They will, in the not too distant future, pass us like we're standing still.

India is coming on strong, as are many other industrialized and developing nations. As the world demands more and more oil, it will create inevitable price increases. The U.S. is already sending hundreds of billions of dollars out of the country annually—much more than the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This unprecedented massive transfer of many trillions of American dollars within the next decade spells doom for the economy, and if the damn hole is not plugged, will eventually undermine our country.

Those politicians demanding that "we" punish the ***monopoly-exploiting*** Big Oil companies for those ***outrageous excess profits*** they've been socking away are not being level with the public. Rising prices in a free market economy are the consequence of either an increase in demand or a decrease in supply. The rollercoaster-ing of our recent price surges and declines can be primarily attributed to two things: (1) the highly leveraged oil futures contract speculators and (2) fluctuating demands. For example in 2008, U.S. oil demand started out high (prices escalated) and the demand declined some 5.5% (resulting in lower prices) while China's increased 6.5%. The average net profit for oil companies is a little over 7.5%, which is about 2% less than most manufacturers make. Gas station owners aren't socking it away either, making just pennies per gallon. Something else they (the would-be punishers of Big Oil) are not telling you is that we—the USA—are only contributing about 20 percent of those profits. Eighty percent are coming

from somebody else. U.S. owned energy companies only provide about 1.6% of the oil and gas we use and the U.S. harbors only about 2.1% of the total global reserves.

Oil production has been falling since it's peak in 2005 and is getting harder to find and more expensive to refine. Lets not forget that there are more than 500,000 uses for petroleum than gasoline, diesel, and fuel oil—such as the plastics in cars and planes, electronics, synthetic fabrics, detergents, and in some form of just about every consumer product.

Here is just a partial alphabetical list in case you are curious: anything plastic, ammonia, anti-histamines, antiseptics, artificial turf, asphalt, aspirin, balloons, bandages, boats, bottles, bras, bubble gum, butane, cameras, candles, car batteries, car bodies, carpet, cassette tapes, caulking, CDs, chewing gum, combs/brushes, computers, contacts, cortisone, crayons, cream, denture adhesives, deodorant, detergents, dishwashing liquids, dresses, dryers, electric blankets, electrician's tape, fertilizers, fishing rods, floor wax, footballs, glues, glycerin, golf balls, guitar strings, hair, hair coloring, hearing aids, heart valves, heating oil, house paint, ice chests, ink and toners, insect repellent, insulation, jet fuel, life jackets, linoleum, lip balm, lipstick, loudspeakers, medicines, mops, motorcycle helmets, movie film, nail polish, oil filters, paddles, paints and paint brushes, parachutes, paraffin, pens, perfumes, petroleum jelly, plywood adhesives, refrigerators, roofing paper, rubber bands/boots/cement, rubbish bags, running shoes, saccharine, seals, shoes, shoe polish, shower curtains, solvents, stereos, tape recorders, telephones, toilet seats, toners, toothpaste, transparent tape, trash bags, typewriter/computer ribbons, tires, umbrellas, upholstery, vaporizers, vitamin capsules, volleyballs, water skis, wax, wax paper.

Each of the above product manufacturers would be in big trouble if they could not obtain oil. For example, just consider one of them; around 40% of a barrel of oil used to be turned

into asphalt products. Refining techniques to maximize output of profitable fuel has reduced availability to about 10%, meaning municipalities are unable to obtain sufficient quantities to make road repairs and fill potholes.

If we push the ***Big Oil*** sellers too hard we won't even be able to buy as much as we are now doing. They'll sell to the highest bidder. You might as well face it folks! It's a seller's market and the avarice of sellers cannot be overcome. As the market gets squeezed ever tighter the temptation for rogue oil producers such as the Iran, Russia and Venezuela to bargain politically with their valuable commodity (by withholding it) are inevitable.

Meanwhile, our current oil-producing suppliers: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emigrates—will continue to receive trillions of dollars in oil revenue. We are slowly but surely spending or driving (take your choice) ourselves into a very dark, oil-less corner. Ask yourself this: Would someone intentionally withhold a product merely to inflate its value and keep the price high? Ask yourself this: How does the De Beers diamond cartel—perhaps the only one with a reputation more fierce than the OPEC cartel—keep their prices up?

What is likely to be the ultimate cost of this? Think of it this way. The above countries are rapidly increasing their wealth and power by selling oil as the U.S. expends its capital and surrenders its power, buying oil from ***them*** in the largest transfer of wealth ever. Our money is being turned over to potentates and dictators who will use it to gain ever-firmer holds over their enslaved populaces. At the risk of stirring up a hornet's nest, I dare say that had we not provided the knowledge and technology to get the oil out of the ground, process and refine it, they would only be using the oil to fuel lamps. This selling our soul for petrol will not only render us less capable of maintaining our national defense and crumbling infrastructure, it could prevent us from remaining the world's

number one super power and keeper of the peace. We are literally driving our super power status away—something that makes Earth a substantially more dangerous place.

Like it or not folks—energy is a weapon and desperate people are willing to do most anything to get it. Huge super tankers with three times the displacement of an aircraft carrier, carrying 100 million dollars worth of crude oil, are being seized by Somali pirate hundreds of miles off the coast of Kenya and held for outrageous ransoms.

Every voter knows where we are **not** drilling and how many refineries we have **not** built in the last 20 years. Every time I hear some talking head astutely proclaim that, **"*we cannot drill our way out of the problem*"** I want to throw up. What sheer brilliance. "Ah ha!" they say. We therefore simply need to discover a clean burning, non-polluting alternative source that provides unlimited amounts of energy. I have bad news for you. Most of the alternative energy aficionado's assertions are not much more than wishful thinking media pasteurized and well-adulterated 'BULLCHIPS!'

The oil and gas business is risky with many dry holes. It takes years and years of effort to explore for oil or natural gas—obtain the permits, drill and find it, pump it up and transport it to refineries, then store and transport it to end users. I'm not by any means taking sides here, but they are being continually threatened, blocked, sued and scorned by a wide variety of environmental extremists, not to mention every NIMBY who joins the frenetic dance of insanity.

Extracting that black goo from Mother Earth is a grimy, muddy, extremely dangerous and seemingly impossible task. There are good reasons they call oil field workers *roughnecks*. I saw this happen up close and personal as a boy in Texas when they drilled for oil on my grandparent's farm. I watched in amazement as that purpose driven hard-hatted workforce

clanged, clunked, cursed, and bored their way down, inch-by-inch, into that hard Texas soil.

About a quarter of U.S. oil production comes from the Gulf Of Mexico where companies are drilling 200 miles offshore in water 7500 feet deep with oil a mile below the ocean floor. Platforms costs billions of dollars to erect and it takes years to bring up any oil. The exploration risks, scientific knowledge, and engineering efforts required must be complex beyond imagination. Such difficult activity is bound to have occasional accidents (usually some type of human error)—hence situations like the horrendous 2010 Deepwater Horizon BP Incident that spilled millions of gallons of oil into the pristine Gulf of Mexico. The messy reminders of that horrible offshore oil spill will be with for decades as the billion dollar lawsuits and legal battles rage on.

Whether it's United States companies drilling or other nations, the Gulf is a continuously evolving environmental threat with depleted wells repressurizing from work on nearby wells or shifts in oil and gas layers beneath the surface. It's interesting to note that official government documents reveal that the Gulf currently harbors over 27,000 abandoned oil wells that have been sealed with cement and some 3,200 old wells that remain unused without any plugging to help prevent spills. At least 50,000 wells drilled in the Gulf have been left behind with no further monitoring for leaks.

How in the world those deep-water engineers ever accomplish such complex drilling it is beyond me. But they do, when some interest group isn't blocking them. While protestors and self-serving politicians prevent offshore drilling, other countries are staking claims and drilling right off our coasts. While concerned road blockers debate the risk to our pristine coastlines, other countries are laying claim to our natural resources. For the last quarter century Congress has issued an annual directive barring the Interior Department from granting

any leases for oil and gas drilling in federal water off both of our coasts. While we have been stymied by political haggling with anti-progressive environmental protectionist groups, other countries including China and Cuba are formulating plans to slant drill into our off shore oil deposits.

But, like I said previously, the oil business is risky. If we drill enough offshore wells there will inevitably be some problems. No decent person wants to see those hideous scenes of volunteers cleaning black sludge off seabirds and marine mammals. Not many people want to push their cars around either. But there are other options—aren't there?

Let's look at the miracle of biofuels for instance. We have all heard how Brazil has been *oh so successful* with sugarcane biofuel. What they don't tell you is that Brazilians don't own near as many cars as we do. Major programs are underway everywhere and the biofuel race is on. In the U.S. alone production has exploded from 25 million gallons produced in 2004 to 500 million gallons or 20 times as much in 2007. China, desperate to find solutions to its 6 to 8 percent annual increase of energy consumption has set aside about 32 million acres (an area the size of Great Britain) to grow Jatropha, a wild species of African oilseed plant with highly toxic leaves and nuts requiring extreme caution in the handling. Cultivation is unreliably low and cost-efficient productivity has not yet been established.

America grown corn is certainly not the answer either. America has been using about 21 million barrels a day, down about a million barrels per day in 2008, due to soaring prices and a sagging economy. If the United States committed 100 percent of our available cropland just to the production of ethanol, we would net some 2 to 3 million barrels of oil per day. Unfortunately, we would also have nothing to eat. Talk about escalating prices.

For years, the federal government has been funneling billions of dollars to subsidize ethanol corn growers. This is impracticable and totally unproductive when factoring in the energy and expense expanded in fertilizing, planting, harvesting, and shipping the corn. Such policies are not only foolish; they are jacking up the worldwide cost of corn and causing food riots and political instability. That is a very serious issue for those folks around the world we've been feeding. They might become a little irritated when they get really hungry. See the problem?

Other than the fact that the technology to produce ethanol is not yet that well dialed in, in spite of the $4 billion a year in government incentives. It is mostly boondoggle! In fact it appears that it takes as much energy, if not more, to produce ethanol than the benefits it deliver, an effort requiring nearly as much fossil fuel as it replaces. Studies have shown that forests and grasslands plowed under to grow ethanol crops release massive amounts of carbon (greenhouse gases) into the atmosphere, requiring decades for the ethanol crop plants to recapture. Corn had remained steady at around $2 a bushel for many years. It is now over $6 a bushel, so farmers, not being fools, are switching land planted in other crops such as wheat and soybeans to corn. This is escalating prices for those commodities and for the beef, poultry and pork animals that consume the more expensive corn in order to sacrifice their lives for our tables. Fuel is competing with food and whom are these whacko policies going to hurt the most? The masses—significantly those with lower incomes.

Another complicating issue is the increasing size of environmental dead zones being created in land-to-water boundary areas like the Gulf of Mexico. The culprit is agricultural runoff producing oxygen-starved patches that impacts established marine life—disrupting their environment

and life cycles. This is predominantly caused by heavy-fertilization of crops in efforts to produce more ethanol.

Masses of amount of money are being invested by companies frantically trying to develop some kind of non-food based biofuel from wood chips, green waste or algae, sorghum, camelina (flax), energy grasses like miscanthus or switch grass, and even municipal waste.

Creating workable infrastructures for such products and bringing them on-line just can't happen that fast. As stated above, there are meetings to be held, political palms to be greased, environmental extremist protestors to be ignored, skeptics to be convinced, NIMBY crowds to be overcome and many necessary compromises to be fought tooth and blood over.

We are hearing a lot of talk these days about another amazing alternative fuel—Compressed Natural Gas or CNG, which consists mostly of methane. It is not new, having been around forever and is one of the brightest lights on the energy horizon. It costs about half as much as gasoline, and we have an abundance of it. It is odorless, colorless and tasteless and much less harmful to the environment since it has some 90% less emissions than gasoline. Sadly, the U.S. is lagging far behind the rest of the world with only 150 thousand out of the more than 8 million vehicles using CNG with many of these being commercial vehicle fleets.

We do not currently have enough CNG fueling stations and costs to establish the infrastructure will be high. Present conversions average between 3 to 5-thousand dollars per automobile. Because the calorific value is much less than other fuels, CNG vehicles require more fuel space. The tanks are quite large and heavy, usually taking up the entire trunk area. In addition, the driving ranges are significantly less than comparable gasoline engines. There is also some concern about

how to fight CNG fires. The prototypes we are just starting to see are merely the vanguard of CNG vehicles, which will undoubtedly be manufactured with safer components and lighter aluminum fuel tanks hung under the body leaving the trunk space free.

Well then, you say—how about those flex-fuel vehicles? Aren't they going to seriously reduce the need for oil? Sure… and please allow me to tell you about this bridge I have for sale. There is hope, but it has not been widely revealed that E85 Ethanol currently ends up costing drivers more than gasoline. Why? The lower compression automobile engines in use by the masses today are designed to operate on gasoline. Mixing of ethanol into gasoline does not result in more *miles-per-gallon*—only a dilution of the gasoline. An ethanol-only (not a gas-ethanol hybrid) designed car would reduce dependency on imported oil but as with CNG the infrastructure is still decades away from reality. On a positive note the use of ethanol is more environmentally friendly (less emissions).

That brings us to the fuel cell and cars powered by hydrogen. There is much interesting research going on in this area. With only water as an emission, fuel cells are environmentally friendly and hold real promise. Who could find fault in a system using the reaction of hydrogen and oxygen to produce electricity?

Automakers are experimenting with and talking up fuel cells, which could offer a quiet, efficiently operating vehicle with low maintenance costs. The biggest problem is that so far, they've only come up with handmade specialty cars that have costs them about a million dollars each. It may be a while before the concept is perfected. The ability to mass-produce hydrogen autos at a cost affordable to the driving public is still many years away.

Another significant problem to be addressed is the hydrogen-refueling infrastructure that will be required—more expensive than even politicians can imagine. While hydrogen atoms are 'everywhere' the ability to make it available as a source of energy is not easy. There are many economic and energy penalties associated with packaging, distribution, storage and transfer of hydrogen. Who is going to pay for all those many thousands of needed hydrogen refueling stations? Cars must be able to store enough of it to actually drive somewhere. So far, the calculated costs of the infrastructure are slightly less than astronomical to get such vehicles into the marketplace. I wouldn't hold my breath waiting.

Electric Cars? Hybrid cars. Sure thing. Thus far, even large arrays of batteries can't store a sufficient amount of electricity to provide the driving mileage of comparable gas vehicles. When millions of them are plugged in every night recharging their large batteries draining those thousands of giga-watts of electricity required, the meters on our electrical grids are going to be begging for mercy. If you have owned one, and enjoyed the thrill of replacing those very expensive batteries and still think it was a good idea, you probably still believe in Santa Claus. The battery systems of today are very heavy and do not provide long battery capacity—however as the industry switches over to higher capacity lithium ion batteries things will improve. Lithium is the lightest metal and stores more energy with less volume than the standard nickel-metal hydride battery. It is the key to lightness and longer battery life. Even so, a hybrid lithium battery will weigh well over a hundred pounds. Unfortunately there is also a premium of about $10-thousand with a meager 40-mile range, making it tough to justify.

Let me not be totally negatively charged here. I have no doubt, that in the not too distant future, we will be driving vehicles with a wide variety of alternative fuel technologies including gas/electric hybrids with electric fuel cells, lithium-

ion batteries, hydrogen powered fuel cells, rooftop solar panels with futuristic concepts beyond anything we can envision today.

Coal is a dirty business. The true costs of extracting are high with unbelievable harmful consequences. It is okay if you don't mind scaring the ground, polluting the water, destroying ecosystems and eliminating a few mountaintops. It's a dirty business and it always has been. Black lung disease. Mine collapses. Minors trapped. Enough said. It will of course, pollute the atmosphere with sulfate particles causing acid rain. Lest we not forget, other energy starving countries could care less about such trivial maters as environmental pollution. China is currently building the equivalent of one large coal-fired power station per week even though there have been out of control underground coal fires burning there for centuries.

Shale oil liquefaction? No problem! Just tear down the Rocky Mountains. Who cares about them? Oh! That's right. I forgot about the hikers and mountain goats. Anyway, it has to be mined, crushed, and baked in massive quantities to extract the gooey prize. Vast amounts of water are necessary to cool and stabilize it. Once all that water has been located, piped to the quarry extraction areas, used and contaminated, you can just pump it right back…. er… oh… never mind. Talk about carbon footprints. It is thought that the North American oil sands volume contains more oil than all the reserves in Saudi Arabia, but economic recovery is the problem. If the price goes high enough and remains there, it could be done.

Coal to liquid? Since it is technically a kind of solid petroleum it too can be converted using similar liquefaction presses. That is, once you get it out of the ground. But, lets not forget, anything we can squeeze or process into killer-watts should be on the table. Clean coal is an oxy-moron if I ever heard one. There isn't any such thing as clean coal Getting at those tar sands will result in equally great environmental damage due to the mining required.

Wind power? An excellent idea. It proved very effective with that very first sailboat and is also excellent for kite flying. A ten million dollar grant was recently given researchers to explore the flying of kites thousands of feet high in order to take advantage of stronger winds at higher elevations. An innovative German shipping organization is fabricating huge kites, attached to freighters crossing the oceans. Believe it or not, it saves about 20 percent on fuel costs. The company hopes to fit 1,500 ships with the giant sails by 2015.

When used as an energy source wind does generate some interesting scenery—millions of huge (think football field size) towering wind turbines atop ever hill and breezy pass, their huge rotor blades humming away as they whip the air converting mechanical energy into electrical energy, whacking the occasional dumb bird. It also takes up a lot of space. With current technology, a wind generation facility would require about 40,000 acres to produce the same peak energy as a single nuclear power plant on 10 acres of land. Besides, certain oceanfront homeowners (myself included) do not like the look of offshore wind parks, so we mustn't think about putting them there, and wind turbines just wouldn't look well on top of cars. It's also pretty hard to store wind for later use.

Some high-minded types are conceptualizing getting power up at high altitudes (where the jet stream always blows fast and furious) with huge highflying balloons, kites or helium-filled football size (did you ever notice how many things are expected to be football field size?) wind generators. Such contraptions would have to deal with extreme wind gusts, lightening strikes, and a myriad of other problems.

Solar Power? The land required for solar power generation is even more than that required for wind. It's true that the sun packs a lot of punch. There can be no doubt of that. We will more than likely have a mandate to install solar panels on the roof of every new building within a few years. Meanwhile, you

can buy one for your home and get a small tax credit that will just about cover the beer consumed by the workmen who will be installing that huge contraption on top of your lovely future leaking roof. A residential installation can range upward from sixty to a hundred-grand today. They work fairly adequate too, when not in need of some kind of repair. You'll be able to recover the investment you made in about 20 to 25 years—which, with some good luck—is coincidentally—about the amount of time it will function before becoming obsolete, and you will have to tear it down and purchase another one. Proposed tax incentives and other innovative solutions will no doubt promote greater usage. Don't be too concerned about those high maintenance costs. Just think of how much money you will make selling your spare electricity back to the electric companies.

Some brave dudes want to drill down into the earth to capture geothermal energy. Ooookaaay. You guys go right ahead. I'll just stand waaaaay back and watch. I've seen what the Mt. St. Helen's volcano did. Just don't forget to have an appropriately sized cork handy. Perhaps we could arrange a free trip to the Big Island for these guys the next time Kilauea acts up. A nice hot glass of 2100 degree F molten lava should calm them down.

Scientists are busy exploring ways to create hydroelectric power from the constant motion of surging waves, the forces of tides or sea currents. Research is being conducted with floating devices that bob up and down and others suspended like swings under the water to generate electricity from rising and falling pressure as waves pass over. Others are trying to develop systems of anchoring huge turbines to the bottom of the seafloor in areas where steady currents would continually spin the turbines, generating electricity that would be carried ashore via underwater cables. Think corrosion, and how well electricity mixes with water.

In our never ending quest to generate hydrodynamic power we've already dammed up so many rivers that spawning fish can't penetrate the barriers. As I write this, there is an earmark floating around that politicians are actually trying to get approved, calling for 1.1 billion bucks (that's billion with a 'B') to put salmon back into an already dry river. The chance of such a plan working is slim at best. However, the project would be deemed successful if only 500 salmon return. That would mean spending 21 million for each fish. And you thought salmon was expensive the last time you bought it. This is no fish tale.

Proponents ask what would be wrong with installing millions, if not billions, of assorted contraptions in our oceans? After all, the seas only cover 71% of the Earth's surface. And if you look at the ocean, it seems to be fairly placid, at least on the surface. So what if all the big fish are disappearing due to over fishing, the waters are becoming acidified, and pollution has temporarily closed, or put under advisory almost every beach here in the United States. It's not too important that the algae and kelp forests in the oceans absorb carbon dioxide, which keeps the environment healthy. The fish are going to adapt. They always have.

Cutting edge scientists are endeavoring to create power from all kinds of strange alternative sources such as geysers, old utility poles, garbage, algae and bacteria, and even cow manure. To manufacture chemicals for fuel cells, chemists have discovered how to imitate nature through artificial photosynthesis using solar power to split water into hydrogen and oxygen easier and less expensive than ever before.

Then we come to the mother-of-all power sources—nuclear energy, the only existing technology capable of providing cheap, carbon-free energy. We must not let ourselves be frightened away from the only real alternative to fossil-fuel based energy sources. It supplies about a sixth of the world's energy. Everyone knows that France is getting about 80% of its

electricity from nuclear power while in the U.S. we're only managing about 20%. Are we going to let ***them*** beat us?

Alas, going nuclear is no walk in the park either. It's true that uranium-based nuclear power provides practically unlimited sources of energy without leaving any of those nasty carbon prints. However there are other significant drawbacks including: nature, containment (radiation leaks) and terrorist attacks. Then there is the dangerous disposal (storage) of spent enriched nuclear material. I spent years on nuclear submarines and am fairly knowledgeable in the dangers of operating and containing nuclear power systems.

A nuclear reactor is kind of like having a pet rattlesnake; it is reasonably safe as long as you can keep it in its cage and be very careful when you feed it. Their biggest weakness is generally some type of human-error. People take shortcuts, and doze off. Even if we could build reactors to withstand all earthquakes, tsunamis, and natural disasters (the Fukushima incident pretty much proved we can't), one can't engineer against mismanagement, incompetence and greed. It is our nature to make mistakes. All the oversight in the world cannot predict the unfortunate inevitability of eventual human performance failure, and due to the technical complexity of nuclear reactors there will always be ongoing safety issues. Additionally, in spite of *stringent operating standards*, *intense scrutiny, constant evaluations and meticulous special inspections*, reactors are also subject to some maintenance difficulties.

Nuclear accidents are, by their very nature, **NIGHTMARES**! We got off easy with Three-Mile Island. The consequences of the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan have pointed out clearly some of the potential hazards of nuclear power. The consequences can be severe and a long time coming. I have no doubt that in Japan there will be countless cases of thyroid cancer and radiation-caused leukemia in future

years. The Chernobyl accident (our worst nuclear disaster) did create a large uninhabitable dead-zone, and killed around 30 people. Many more are projected to die in the future. It displaced some 350,000 people and caused billions of dollars in property damage.

When we consider that the first *nuclear power plant* started up in 1954, and since that time there have been fewer than 100 deaths directly attributed to *their failure*, nuclear power looks pretty darn safe. Still, I wouldn't want to live near the Nevada Test Site where more than 900 nuclear explosions were set off between 1951 and 1992. You've probably heard about the thousands of cases of thyroid cancer that occurred in Utah from the radioactive fallout. But, even if we accept the exaggerated projections of worldwide collateral deaths somewhere in the area of 10,000 total deaths from nuclear power, the toll is still less than 200 per year, considerably lower than other power sources. For example, in China alone somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000 people died from floods, cave-ins, fires and explosion in coal mine accidents in 2005. Estimates are that 600,000 Chinese coal miners suffer from black ling disease. There are about 1.2 million traffic fatalities per year. You don't even want to know how many die in other energy acquisition accidents. So, bans and moratoriums on nuclear power is no way to go.

On the other hand, enriched uranium is more hazardous to humans and the environment than I can hope to define. Enriched uranium has a shelf life of billions of years. Fortunately, nuclear reactor waste products, comprised primarily of spent fuel rods, are not nearly as hazardous. Unfortunately, it is just about the most dangerous material known to man. Exposure to its intense radiation will kill you within minutes. Then there are the various pipes and structural components of the reactor, which are not nearly as radioactive It

need only be kept isolated from all contact with man for a few thousand years.

You might be amazed to learn how much radioactive stuff is lying around. At Americas 104 nuclear power plants, we currently have about 65,000 metric tons of highly radioactive nuclear waste now being dangerously stored in 126 intrinsically insecure above ground sites located within 75 miles of where more than 161 million Americans live.

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 was enacted to safely store and/or dispose of the waste and all nuclear plants were required to pay $750 million every year into a Quarterly Waste Fund. So far, they've pumped some $24 billion into the fund, but not a single ounce of spent nuclear material has been disposed of through the fund. The Powers That Be are still arguing whose backyard it should be stored in.

Proponents keep talking about big repositories—really deep caverns within the ground where it can be quietly tucked away until someone else is responsible. The Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Storage Facility in Nevada was supposed to be the answer. Opponents theorized that radioactivity could seep into underground water supplies and turn us all into bug-eyed crazed zombies.

I'm not sure who is right. One thing is certain. In addition to generating plenty of power, nuclear reactors also generate plenty of controversy. In the meantime, spent fuel rods continue to be stored at nuclear power plants awaiting consequences such as those that occurred in Japan.

But do not be despondent. We are all being exposed to some radiation right this moment. Cosmic streams from space are shooting into us every second of our lives. We eat it in our food, drink it in our milk and breathe it in our air. X-rays from our TV's and computer screens emit radiation. So do bananas, granite countertops and even cat litter. Americans absorb about

360 millren (one measure of radiation) into their bodies each year. A cross-country flight will get you 2 to 5 millrens. Amazingly, it isn't killing us and we need not fear it, as long as it is properly contained. I've slept many a night only a few feet from nuclear reactors and atomic weapons and it never made me the slightest bit crazy. Tee Hee Hee! Stop that I say.

Lastly, speaking of nuclear, there is another race for the *ultimate energy* going on by cutting edge scientists around the world endeavoring to capture star shine creating plasma hotter than our sun. In theory, if this most difficult of all scientific quests can be resolved, enabling mankind to harness **Cold Fusion or Bubble Fusion**, it would provide an endless supply of unlimited power. Thus far, there have been some wild claims, but no actual breakthroughs. If such a miracle ever occurs our energy problems are over.

While I am in the Twilight Zone, if you remember the old Starship Enterprise used to kick in their warp drives (theoretically some mixture of matter and anti-matter). If we could accomplish such a thing, we could really get around. Unfortunately, there are no known sources of anti-matter. We'd have to make it, which a few way-out dudes are attempting to do with particle accelerators such as the CERN near Geneva. Their calculations are that it would have to run for 100 trillion years to make a kilogram of antiprotons. Let's impatiently standby.

Other Twilight Zone contemporaries and misguided political idealists may think that they can *make it all good* by simply *insisting*. They would *set* hard caps on carbon emissions, *demanding* high fuel mileage from automobile manufacturers, *enforcing* consumers to buy hybrid and flex-fuel vehicles with a minimum of 150 mile-per-gallon fuel economy. They fail to

consider how many people will be killed in accidents involving lightweight kiddy cars instead of our big ole SUV's.

They would merely "REQUIRE" the vast energy sector to supply preset amounts (which they, in great wisdom will determine) of energy from renewable sources. The most notable error in their miscalculations is that by 2050 there will be 420 million Americans—40 million more households. Meeting such unrealistic hard caps would entail reducing per capita carbon emissions to levels below those of the colonial days when we only burned wood for fuel.

Every time gas prices spike upward a bit, short thinking fools demand that we relieve high prices by tapping our vital Strategic Petroleum Reserves to drive down the costs. Perhaps they think it is some *vast unlimited storehouse* for their political use. It is true we only paid an average of $28.42 per barrel for it, but there is presently only enough oil for 33 days at the 21 million barrels per day we have been using. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, our withdrawal capability is only 4.4 million barrel per day, making it a 160-day supply. But then it would be gone, and we would either have to forget about that possible ***rainy day*** or replace it at the current higher prices, which makes it a bad idea all the way around.

I do realize that it's much easier to be a 'naysayer' than a doer. But, I've been playing devil's advocate here and pointing out some of the reasons why there is no quick and easy fix to the energy problem. It is not surprising that about 60 billion dollars has been spent on research and development of clean energy technology by the U.S. Department of Energy in the last 3 decades. However, anyone thinking the United States can get all of our energy from within our own country in the next few years is dreaming. By most estimates we have only about 3 percent of the world's proven oil reserve and therefore energy independence can't and won't happen in the near future.

The universe runs on energy. It is everywhere. Anything that churns or burns, moves or grooves, heats or cools, bends, wends or distends, winks or blinks, flows, blows, splashes or crashes, shakes, quakes or bakes, shivers or quivers, flops, drops or plops, slips, drips or tips, jiggles, wiggles or squiggles, bumps or thumps, squirts or spurts, inflates, grates, evaporates or mutates, sprays, decays or emits rays or changes property in any way. Energy is a great wild horse (think horse power). We must harness it, saddle it up, and learn how to ride. We mustn't let it throw us. It is going to require using all the ingenuity and skill we've got—if we are to tame it.

That cannot be accomplished with panic. We **must** get real and face the fact that we are being left behind in the energy race. We need to stop the roadblocks by demanding that politicians cease fishing in the bottomless lake of our national debt. We **must** collectively shut down or find a way to ignore the ***false promises, deluded thinkers, political opportunists, and paranoid environmental extremists***. It is high time we realize that the future is not nearly as bleak as naysayers would have us think. Arrogant mandates and bureaucratic meddling that impose ridiculous regulations and subsidies are endeavors of little value and will generally only cause energy prices to soar.

Galileo was imprisoned for the last 10 years of his life for theorizing that the sun was at the center of the universe. Columbus was doomed to failure, skeptics thought. Organ transplants were far too risky to work, naysayers said. History is replete with examples of egotistical road blockers who impeded the path of progress. Avoiding risk and playing it safe are natural human tendencies, especially for pundits and spin-doctors.

We need to provide incentives for our institutions of higher learning to turn out more engineers, scientists, and researchers and fewer fleets of hungry litigation attorneys, community

activists, and anti-socialistic alarmists. We must not sell our souls to the 'devil' of environmental protectionism. We must unshackle the restraints imposed on America's energy producers.

However, we shouldn't throw caution to the winds. What we obviously ought not do is establish hasty and ill-conceived energy policies with devil-may-care drilling strategies likely to create significant environmental impact, or open up every exploration blockade, end all deep ocean exploration prohibitions and refinery development restrictions. We mustn't go hog-wild and just get rid of those unwieldy environmental regulations, agricultural tariffs and begin to build, build, build—refineries, processing plants for ethanol, methanol, bio-fuels or liquid coal.

We need to establish the best possible protective and preventative measures to avoid problems, without forcing injudicious offshore drilling in shallow-water pristine areas where environmental impact consequences could be tragic. We don't need to demand at least (pick a number) of nuclear power plants by (pick a date). Neither should we allow political gridlock or create heavy taxation of those capitalistic fat cat Big Oil companies, which would likely prevent them from continuing to invest billions of dollars in research for alternative energy sources and the mythical ultra fuel-efficient car. Ultimately, profits are the best incentive.

Keeping all this in mind, we should proceed with caution at full speed pursuing every possibility. There should be no limitations and nothing held back. After all, if the energy-gobbling monster does annihilate us, it will be too late for this species to do it all over again. I sense what you are thinking. It's a hell of a lot easier to criticize than it is to actually do something about it. Do I only offer up criticism or do I have any real solutions for you personally? Sure I do. Here they are—for real!

Drive less, and if you can't…

Drive slower, and if you can't…

Get the smallest, most economical (but safe) car you can to go where you need to go, and if you can't…

Telecommute (work at home) if possible, and if you can't…

Move as close to your job site as you can, and if you can't…

Carpool, and if you can't…

Keep your car tuned up, and if you can't…

Keep your cars tires properly inflated, (not ***over*** or ***under*** because both can be very bad). And if you can't even do that, you ought not be driving a car. In which case I suggest you…

Take public transportation, and if you can't… or won't…

Walking is a very fuel-efficient means of transportation.

Lastly, America does have the will power, the scientific/technical knowledge and industrial know-how to resolve these myriad problems and will eventually do so. It can accomplish this goal even faster if the assorted road blockers mentioned above will just get out of the way. However, if you politicians feel you must do something—think incentives—tax breaks for energy saving contributors, whoever they might be.

I'm really tempted to lurch into the myths and realities of *global warming* because the activist movement (deluded or dishonest?) must not be allowed to force disproportionate restrictions in order to feather their own nests or pad their resume. The hypothesis that mankind's 3 percent contribution to 0.04 percent total atmospheric carbon dioxide total is a major driver of our planet's climate is far from having been proven.

I have no trouble with America leading the fight against global warming, which may or may not be occurring, but not at the cost of our economic stability. We must not allow the irrational demonization of petroleum usage through the imposition of unnecessary expenditures such as increased taxes, economically infeasible renewable resource mandates, massive subsidies, over regulation, and those ridiculous (who gets the money?) carbon offsets. But I'll save that for another time.

MY PRESIDENTS

It was an election year, and I was as oblivious to politics as a camel is to the Antarctic. All I cared about was selling Waco newspapers to the gathered crowd. When the speech-making part was over I started hustling. There was a line and I was going down it, wearing my earnest "buy a paper from me please" smile. I suddenly realized this loud talking man was coming toward me, distracting my potential customers by shaking their hands and joking with them. I stopped in my tracks, wondering if I ought to be on the other side of that darn rope, when the big guy stopped right in front of me.

He looked huge and glared down at me like he was deciding if he was going to eat me or not. Then he grinned and spit out some Texas drawl. "Cain I rub yore haid fer luck red?"

I looked up at him awkwardly, having only a vague idea what he had said, when he grabbed my shoulder with his left hand and stuck out his huge right hand and gave my natural curly red hair a thorough tossing. Ordinarily that would have been cause for a fast fistfight, but he was way too big and I was way too stunned to react. I was dumbfounded. Having rubbed off all the luck my hair had, he moved quickly past me, pumping any outstretched hands and kissing any babies he could get at. I recall hearing someone in the crowd remark (behind his back of course) that Lyndon would have a good future in politics, if he was not so damn crooked. That brief contact with LBJ was my first Presidential meeting, so to speak.

Since that time, life has had a funny way of playing the "meet the President" game with me. I don't know if it could be passed off as just dumb Irish luck, or strange providence. I'll tell you about it and you decide.

The next President I met was not in office either. He was a composed and unassuming young nuclear submarine officer

stationed in New London Connecticut. I just happened to be a nuclear submariner stationed there at the same time. Although we were not assigned to the same submarine, I did attend some of his lectures, and see him around regularly, which meant that he had to salute me. Well, technically since I was the enlisted man, I had to salute him, but President Carter-to-be did have to return every one of my salutes.

My next Presidential Meeting was more dignified, since Ike was already in office. He came to see me on board the U.S.S. SEAWOLF, which made him the first U.S. President to ever go to sea on a nuclear submarine. I ate lunch with him. Yes, at the same table and seated adjacent to the President. I got there on account of hailing from Texas (Ike was originally from Abilene) and also being the youngest sailor on board. Later, when we were at sea, I was standing right behind him in the conning tower as he peered through the periscope. Unfortunately—only the top of my white hat made the cover of Time magazine with him.

I briefly met JFK, or President Kennedy as I called him; when he came to observe the U.S.S. PERMIT, another nuclear submarine, perform. But I don't really count it as one of my official presidential meetings because I didn't get to shake his hand or anything. I just stood at attention and saluted as he passed.

Not long after I got out the Navy, I found myself in the recreational boat business in southern California. One day, a charming and personable rather fast talking young fellow came to inquire about a position as a yacht salesman. It was Michael Reagan and we gladly brought him on board. He and I became close friends and worked together at several dealerships. We've been friends ever since.

Thanks to Mike and his lovely wife Colleen, I spent lots of 'black-tie' time at political affairs and consequently, had long

personal and meaningful discussions with Governor and later on President Reagan, whom I gave lots of advice on world affairs. I wish. But I did meet him. Without a doubt—President Reagan was one of the most impressive, kind, and dignified gentlemen I've ever met.

I've also met an ex-president. In the 1970's, after Richard Nixon had resigned his office, I was involved in the marketing of a new type of ultra-sonic baby monitor and in that capacity I traveled to Washington D.C. to make a speech to parents of babies who had died of the sudden infant death syndrome or SIDS. Wouldn't you know that Dick would be traveling by common carrier and be on my return flight. Unfortunately he was in first class and I was in, shall we say, the back of the 'bus'.

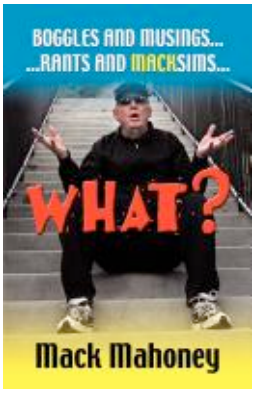
My attractive traveling companion, having no fear of rejection, name dropping, or self-pandering, casually strolled up there and managed to take a seat next to him long enough to secure his promise to make a speech at her ladies club, which of course he later on never did.

The hard pill for me to swallow though—was when she insisted on dragging me up to first class for a heartfelt introduction. Didn't the woman know I already knew enough Presidents? I shook hands with RN and we briefly chatted. I then skulked back to the cattle car while my worser-half enjoyed a cocktail with the defrocked Ex-President, who was slightly lacking friends about that time.

The epilog for this particular tale has to be the most ironic thing of all. I'm from Waco, and George "W" Bush's ranch was located only a short distance from my little sister and brother-in-law's ranch. By Texas standards, it's a fairly small and low populated rural area, and most folk there-bouts know most o' thar' neighbors. And yet—even though I've hung out a bit in Crawford—and driven right by his spread—I never even met

the man. Of course, neither has my sister. Since then, my sister has moved back to California. But President Bush has a home not very far from my other sister's house in the Big "D"—so I still have hope.

Speaking of hope—as for President Obama… well… I've lived in Hawaii and been to Chicago a number of times. Does that count for anything? Is my Karma fading or what?



QUESTIONS THIS BOOK ANSWERS What's the difference between men and women? What's life really like on a nuclear submarine? What's the truth about the energy crisis? Is there is a God? Are women more courteous than men? How does one accumulate wealth? Who are twelve people you won't meet in Heaven? What are the biggest mistakes you can make? What's the truth about body piercing? What can happen on a sidewalk? Are human real?

WHAT?

Boggles and Musings… Rants and Macksims