

NOT LONG AGO A FRIEND ASKED ME WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE. HE WASN'T TALKING ABOUT CIGARETTES. I'M LUCKY THAT I DON'T GET ASKED QUESTIONS LIKE THAT MORE OFTEN SINCE MORE THAN ONE ACQUAINTANCE HAS REMARKED THAT I LOOK LIKE I SHOT ALL THE DOTS OFF MY DICE IN THE 1960'S. BUT I DIDN'T; THE TRUTH IS THAT I WAS BORN WITH SEVERAL DOTS MISSING AND SOME OTHERS THAT WEREN'T GLUED ON TOO WELL. THEY FELL OFF IN THE RAIN AFTER I MOVED TO OREGON, MAKING ME WHAT I AM TODAY. THAT SKULL FRACTURE IN FEBRUARY OF 1966 HAS, CONTRARY TO POPULAR MYTH, NO BEARING WHATEVER ON THE MATTER AT HAND, WHICH I'M SURE I'LL REMEMBER AGAIN IN JUST A MINUTE OR TWO. SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT'S NOT WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

IT'S NOT BECAUSE OF NANCY REAGAN AND ALL HER RICH ILK HAVING CONVINCED ME TO JUST SAY "NO". JUST TRY THIS ON: NEXT TIME YOU FIND YOURSELF BORN INTO A SLUM, BROUGHT UP ON A DIET OF CHEETOS, PAINT FLAKES AND KING COBRA IN SIXTEEN-OUNCE CANS, SURROUNDED BY RAPE AND MURDER AND IGNORED BY A GOVERNMENT THAT WOULD RATHER THROW MONEY AT S&L LOANSHARKS AND BETTER WAYS TO BLOW UP THE RUSSKIS, JUST SAY "NO" TO THE NEXT DIME BAG OF MEXICAN TAR HEROIN THAT YOUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR (THE ONE WITH A CAR AND A TV) DROPS INTO YOUR HAND. ONE OF MY NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS IN A PREVIOUS LIFETIME RODE POLO PONIES IN COLLEGE AND ONCE REMARKED THAT HE WANTED THE GOVERNMENT TO STOP REWARDING PEOPLE WHO FAILED AND WERE POOR BY GIVING THEM HANDOUTS AND INSTEAD REWARD THOSE PEOPLE WHO, ON THE OTHER HAND, SUCCEEDED AND MADE LOTS OF MONEY-BY NOT TAXING THEM. THIS GUY WAS SERIOUS, HE VOTED FOR REAGAN TWICE AND HE SMOKED WHILE PLAYING THE GUITAR. I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT CIGARETTES. I BELIEVE THERE IS A SPECIAL CORNER OF HELL RESERVED FOR PEOPLE LIKE HIM, KIND OF AN INNER-CITY ETHIOPIA SEVERAL QUANTUM LEAPS BELOW DANTE'S SUB-BASEMENT, WITH NO SMOKING ALLOWED. THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

SOME PEOPLE DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE BECAUSE IT ALTERS THEIR SENSE OF TIME OR THEIR SENSE OF DISTANCE AND PERSPECTIVE (IMAGINE COMING HOME TO DISCOVER THAT YOU'D ALREADY BEEN HOME FOR HALF AN HOUR). THE DRUG EDUCATION FILM WE SAW IN HIGH SCHOOL HAD A WONDERFUL DEMONSTRATION OF THESE EFFECTS WHICH WAS DONE BY PUTTING A BUNCH OF PROFESSIONAL ACTORS IN A BEAUTIFUL 1959 DE SOTO ADVENTURER CONVERTIBLE (WITH THE 350 HORSE-POWER VERSION OF THE WEDGE-HEAD 383, A TWO-TONE TOMATO SOUP RED OVER IVORY PAINT JOB AND WIDE WHITEWALLS) AND HAVING THEM HOP CURBS DURING TURNS, RUN STOP SIGNS AND FISHTAIL WANTONLY ACROSS THE DOUBLE YELLOW LINE WHILE THEY LAUGHED UNCONTROLLABLY TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF BRAZEN SAXOPHONE MUSIC. WOW. THAT CAR HAD SWEEP-BACK RADIO AERIALS SPRINGING FROM THE TIPS OF THE TAILFINS AND DUAL BLAST-O-MATIC EXHAUST NOZZLES BUILT RIGHT INTO THE REAR BUMPER. I WANTED THAT CAR. BUT THAT FILM (I WOULD KILL FOR A PRINT OF IT TODAY) IS NOT WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

AS TO BRAZEN SAXOPHONE MUSIC, I HAVE BEEN IN A BAND THESE FIVE YEARS WHICH HAS MADE A SPECIALTY (YOU CERTAINLY WOULDN'T WANT TO CALL IT A CAREER) OF PLAYING JUST THAT. IF THEY STILL MADE SCARE FLICKS LIKE THE OLD DAYS

WE'D BE BOOKED SOLID DOING SOUND TRACKS ("OK GUYS, IN THIS NEXT SCENE THE DOPERS IN THE DE SOTO SIDESWIPE A NUN IN A BUICK SO I WANT A BOOGALOO-DOWN-BROADWAY FEEL WITH SOME THUMB POPS ON THE BASS - THEN I WANT YOU TO GET REAL FUNKY RIGHT WHEN THEY JUMP THE CURB, ALL RIGHT? A-ONE-E-AND-A-TWO-E-AND-A...") AND AS TO CARS, I NEVER GOT MY HANDS ON ONE OF THOSE FINNED MONSTERS, HAVING TO CONTENT MYSELF WITH A 1960 VW SEDAN IN COLLEGE. BUT NOW, OUR BANO VEHICLE IS A 1968 CADILLAC HEARSE, A SIX THOUSAND POUND STRATOFORTRESS WITH A 472 VR IN IT. THEY DON'T MAKE THEM ANY BIGGER THAN THIS. IT'S TWENTY FEET LONG, RATED FOR A 3/4 TON LOAD AND HAS AN EIGHT FOOT LONG CARGO HOLD WHICH FEATURES A FULL-LENGTH SLIDING PLATFORM IN THE FLOOR. A TUG ON THE PLATFORM LATCH SENDS IT THREE FEET OUT THE REAR HATCH OPENING, MAKING IT EASY TO LOAD AND UNLOAD BANO EQUIPMENT - JUST THE THING FOR A MIDDLE-AGED BASS PLAYER WITH A BAD BACK. THIS IS BEGINNING TO TOUCH ON WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

WHERE I COME FROM, THE WINTER RAINS START IN SEPTEMBER AND LAST UNTIL MAY OR SOMETIMES JUNE. WE SEE RAIN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY ABOUT HALF THE TIME. THE RIVERS RUN ALL YEAR AND REALLY FILL UP IN WINTERTIME. THESE ARE REAL RIVERS, MIND YOU - NOT THOSE ARROW-STRAIGHT, CONCRETE-LINED DRAINAGE CANALS WITH SAND AND DIRT BIKE TRACKS IN THEM, LIKE THEY HAVE IN L.A. - AND THE BASEMENT OUR BANO PRACTICES IN IS TWO BLOCKS AWAY FROM THE WILLAMETTE RIVER, SECOND BIGGEST IN THE STATE. THERE ARE TIMES OF THE YEAR WHEN A BILGE PUMP IN THE BASEMENT WOULD BE A VALUABLE THING. TO CLEAR THE STORM FLOW, THE BRIDGES OVER THE WILLAMETTE ARE HIGH AND LONG. I LIVE ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE RIVER AND HAVE TO USE THE OLDER, ORIGINAL (NOW EASTBOUND ONLY) BRIDGE COMING HOME AFTER BANO PRACTICE. THIS BRIDGE WAS BUILT WHEN A MODEL "A" FORD WAS A BIG CAR AND IN THOSE DAYS IT USED TO HANDLE ONE LANE EACH OF EAST AND WEST-BOUND TRAFFIC UNTIL THEY BUILT THE SECOND BRIDGE IN THE 1960'S. NOW IT'S ONLY ONE LANE WIDE, BUT STILL SO NARROW THAT IF I'M NOT PROPERLY LINED UP WITH THE HEARSE ON MY FINAL APPROACH TO THE BRIDGE I'LL SCUFF THE WHEEL COVERS SIMULTANEOUSLY ON LEFT AND RIGHT. THIS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

SO IMAGINE A WINTER BANO PRACTICE IN THE BASEMENT OF A VERY OLD MUSIC STORE WITH AN IMAGINARY BILGE PUMP DOING THE FUNKY BOOGALOO IN A BACK CORNER AS WE WORK THROUGH SOME NEW MATERIAL AND DRINK BEER WHILE IT RAINS BUCKETS OUTSIDE IN THE DARK. EVENTUALLY IT'S TIME TO LOAD UP AND GO HOME SO WE CAN GET UP THE NEXT MORNING AND BE PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY - BUT THERE'S ONE OBSTACLE IN MY WAY AND I'LL LET YOU GUESS IF IT HAS ANYTHING AT ALL TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

AT THIS POINT YOU MAY WELL ASK, "JUST WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH AN OLD SCIENCE FICTION TV SERIES CALLED 'THE TIME TUNNEL'?" WELL, THAT'S A PERFECTLY LEGITIMATE QUESTION. IN CASE YOU'D FORGOTTEN, THE TIME TUNNEL WAS ABOUT THESE TWO GUYS (JAMES DARWIN AS DR. TONY NEWMAN AND ROBERT COUBERT AS DR. DOUG PHILLIPS, BOTH OF WHOM ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE WEARING TURTLENECK SWEATERS) AND THIS ENORMOUS MACHINE - THE "LASER-ACTIVATED" TIME TUNNEL. THIS WHOLE THING WAS A TOP-SECRET GOVERNMENT RESEARCH PROJECT, BURIED UNDER THE ARIZONA DESERT, AND RUN BY AN OLDER SCIENTIST IN A WHITE LAB COAT AND HIS YOUTHFUL

FEMALE ASSISTANT (LEE MERIWETHER AS DR. ANNE MAC GREGOR); MOST OF THE TIME THEY STOOD BEHIND A PODIUM-LIKE CONTROL CONSOLE PULLING ON LEVERES AND LOOKING WORRIED WHILE THE TURTLENECK DOCTORS (PROBABLY HONORARY DEGREES) RAN UP A RAMP LEADING INTO A HUGE TUBE OF ELLIPTICAL CROSS-SECTION WITH CORKSCREW WALLS THAT SPIRALLED OFF INTO INFINITY. THE PODIUM WAS POSITIONED SO THE SCIENTISTS COULD STARE STRAIGHT INTO THAT TUBE AS THE TURTLENECK DUO RAN DOWN ITS LENGTH TO MELT INTO NOTHINGNESS AMONGST EXPLODING SMOKE BOMBS TOSSED IN BY STAGE HANDS OFF CAMERA. THIS TUBE SENT THEM BACK (OR FORWARD) IN TIME, WHERE THEY WOULD ENGAGE THEMSELVES IN SOME IMPLAUSIBLE ENTERPRISE (INVOLVING LENGTHY EXPLANATIONS OF WHY THEY WERE DRESSED SO STRANGELY - TURTLENECKS WILL DO THAT, ESPECIALLY IF EVERYONE ELSE AROUND YOU IS WEARING MEDIEVAL SUITS OF ARMOR, CIVIL WAR UNIFORMS, ANIMAL SKINS OR EVEN LIME-GREEN DOUBLE KNIT POLYESTER LEISURE SUITS) HOPEFULLY TO RETURN TO THE PRESENT WITH MORE SMOKE BOMBS AND WEIRD SCIENTIFIC NOISES. HOWEVER, BECAUSE IT HAD NOT BEEN THOROUGHLY TESTED, THE TIME TUNNEL MAJFUNCTIONED RIGHT OFF THE BAT AND COULD ONLY BRING THEM BACK FOR A MOMENT OR TWO, CAUSING LIGHTS TO DIM AS FAR AWAY AS LAS VEGAS. THEN, BEFORE THEY COULD RUN BACK OUT OF THE TUBE IT WOULD HURL THEM OFF INTO SOME OTHER RANDOM POINT IN TIME, THEREBY YIELDING AN AMPLE SUPPLY OF CLIFF-HANGING EPISODES EACH WEEK FOR ONE YEAR STARTING IN SEPTEMBER OF 1966.* ALL THIS HAS ALMOST NOTHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE. ALMOST.

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED TO NEWMAN AND PHILLIPS AND THEIR HONORARY DEGREES? DID THEY MAKE IT BACK OUT OF THE TUBE BEFORE THE SERIES FOLDED, OR DID THEY GET STUCK IN AN ALIEN CONTEXT WEARING THEIR FUTURISTIC TURTLENECKS, SUSPICIOUS WRISTWATCHES AND SHOES WITH CORFAM[®] UPPERS? ARE THEY ROTTING IN SOME MEDIEVAL PRISON FOR THE INSANE, OR DID THEY GET STUCK ON WALL STREET BEFORE THE CRASH OF '29, POISED TO CASH IN ON TRENOS ONLY THEY COULD FORESEE? OR (HEAVEN FORBID!) DID THE MACHINE HAMMER THEM CLEAR BACK INTO THE PALEOZOIC ERA WHERE THEY FROLIC IN THE PRIMORDIAL OOZE WITH THE TRILOBITES? SHOES WITH MAN-MADE UPPERS PROBABLY WOULDN'T HELP MUCH IN THAT CASE. IN THE WORDS OF BLUE OYSTER CULT, HISTORY SHOWS US AGAIN AND AGAIN HOW NATURE POINTS OUT THE FOLLY OF MEN (GODZILLA! WHOA WHOA, THERE GOES TOKYO...). MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TIME MACHINE ITSELF, AFTER THE HOLLYWOOD FINANCIERS SO CALLOUSLY YANKED ITS 220V 3Ø PLUG OUT OF THE WALL? I CAN EASILY IMAGINE IT QUIETLY GATHERING DUST IN SOME BURBANK WAREHOUSE WITH ITS SPIRAL TUBE SWAKING OFF INTO THE BUILDING'S DIM RECESSES. BUT THAT'S NOT WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE. JUST WAIT. I'M NOT DONE YET.

OF COURSE, THE TUBE WAS NOT INFINITELY LONG. AFTER TWENTY FEET OF WOOD AND WIRE, THE TUBE WAS BLOCKED OFF WITH A PAINTED BACKDROP WHICH PERFECTLY REPLICATED THE SPIRAL WALL PATTERN, USING FORCED PERSPECTIVE TO FOOL THE NON-BINOCULAR EYE OF THE TV AUDIENCE INTO BELIEF OF THE INFINITE. AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE FILMING WAS ALWAYS CAREFUL TO START THE SMOKE BOMBS AND SPARKLY FACEDUT BEFORE THE TURTLENECK DUO MADE IT TO THE END OF THE TUBE PROPER AND CRASHED THROUGH THE CANVAS ONTO AN ADJOINING SET. WHY IS IT SO EASY FOR ME TO IMAGINE THEM FLYING THROUGH THE BACKDROP AND TUMBLING ONTO THE SET

* - THANKS TO ROLF GOMPERTZ FOR FILLING IN THE DETAILS OF THIS IMPORTANT TV SHOW.

OF "QUEEN FOR A DAY", TRAINING SMOKE AND TATTERED STRIPS OF PAINTED CANVAS?

THESE THEY'D HAVE TO TELL THE HOST, SAD-EYED JACK BAILEY, A SOB STORY ABOUT HOW THEY'D JUST MANAGED TO BREAK INTO PRIME-TIME TV AS CO-STARS IN A SERIES WITH A PREMISE OF LIMITED PLAUSIBILITY (HARD CORE SCI-FI IN PRE-STAR TREK PRIME TIME TV REALLY WAS HARD TO PULL OFF SUCCESSFULLY), MORE OR LESS CONCOCTED AROUND A SET THE CONSTRUCTION OF WHICH BLEW OFF THE SPECIAL EFFECTS BUDGET FOR THE ENTIRE SERIES IN THE FIRST EPISODE ALONE. AND NOW, BECAUSE OF AN UNFORTUNATE SLIP-UP, THEY HAD NOT ONLY BEEN HURLED OUT OF THEIR OWN CONTEXT AND INTO ONE WHICH WAS UTTERLY ALIEN TO THEM BUT ALSO SEVERELY DAMAGED THE CENTERPIECE SET IN THE PROCESS - AND RUINED THE SHOOTING OF AN IMPORTANT SCENE, THUS IMPERILING THEIR ALREADY SHAKY CAREERS WHICH MIGHT NOW ASSUME MORTAR-SHELL TRAJECTORIES OUT OF THE HOWITZER OF GREAT EXPECTATIONS, THROUGH THE RARIFIED EXTREMES OF BIG TIME TV (IN LIVING COLOR) AND STRAIGHT DOWN INTO THE STULTIFYING OBSCURITY OF TEACHING COMMUNITY-COLLEGE DRAMATIC ARTS CLASSES IN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY OF 1967 OR PERHAPS PICKING UP BIT ROLES IN B MINUS MOVIES OR DOING LOCAL TV COMMERCIALS. YOU SEE, WITH THE TIME TUNNEL NOW BROKEN, HOW COULD THEY RETURN TO THEIR OWN CONTEXT AND RESUME SHOOTING A SERIES WHICH WAS SUPPOSEDLY SET IN THE FUTURE, ESPECIALLY IF THE VIEW DOWN THE TUBE NOW CONSISTED OF A SERIES OF TEDIOUS TALES OF HARD LUCK, POOR JUDGEMENT AND PETTY FAILURE DELIVERED BY A BUNCH OF BLUBBERING, OVERWEIGHT, SEMILITERATE, MIDDLE-AGED OKIE WOMEN IN FLOUR-SACK MUU-MUUS? THE SCIENTIST AND HIS COMELY ASSISTANT COULD YANK THEIR CONTROL LEVERS AND SHOUT FOR MORE POWER ALL THEY WANTED - BUT TO NO EFFECT IN THIS SCENARIO.

OF COURSE, SAD-EYED JACK WOULD THEN STAND BEHIND THE TEARFUL TURTLENECK DUO AND HOLD HIS HANDS OVER THEIR HEADS AND THEN, TO QUANTIFY THE EMPATHETIC RESPONSE OF THE STUDIO AUDIENCE, THE APPLAUSE-O-METER WOULD BE CUT INTO THE UPPER-LEFT CORNER OF THE SCREEN: A BIGGER-THAN-LIFE WESTON VU METER OF PREWAR VINTAGE WITH AN ARROWHEAD SHAPED LIKE A STRETCHED ACE OF SPADES, SENTTWITCHING BY A VACUUM-TUBE AMPLIFIED SIGNAL FROM AN ART DECO ALUMINUM MICROPHONE SUSPENDED OVER THE HEADS OF THE UNWASHED MASSES. PIN THE NEEDLE AGAINST THE STOP AND WIN A SET OF AMERICAN TOURISTER LUGGAGE, A BOTTLE OF "JUNGLE GARDENIA" BY TUVACHÉ (THE FAVORITE FRAGRANCE OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN), A GREYHOUND BUS TICKET BACK HOME TO CORN HOLE, ARKANSAS WITH A CHECK TO COVER YOUR UNEMPLOYED HUSBY'S PROSTATE SURGERY (INCLUDING THE CATHETER IMPLANT), THE ORTHOPEDIC SHOES FOR YOUR RICKETS-AFFLICTED CHILDREN, GRAMMA'S CHEMOTHERAPY WIG, THE BACK RENT AND A NEW MAYTAG WASHING MACHINE. AND TO TOP IT ALL OFF, HERE COMES YOUR LONG-LOST HALF SISTER FROM TEXARKANA BEING LED ONTO THE STAGE WITH TEARS OF JOY STREAMING DOWN HER PASTY FACE. WITH ANY LUCK, OUR BESTWHILE, ERRANT TRAVELLERS IN TIME WOULD GET TO WALK BACK THROUGH THE TUBE IN SATIN AND BRIMME CAPES AND BIG GANDY CROWNS WHEREUPON THEY'D BE OBLIGATED TO COME UP WITH ANOTHER EQUALLY IMPROBABLE RATIONALIZATION OF THEIR MODE OF DRESS. THE TEMPTATION WOULD BE GREAT TO BELIEVE THAT THE TUBE HAD ACTUALLY WORKED, WOULDN'T IT? I'LL LET YOU GUESS WHETHER OR NOT THIS HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE. BUT I DIGRESS.

SHOWS LIKE "THE TIME TUNNEL" REALLY APPEALED TO ME, A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TECH-WEENIE. AS SUCH I ALSO READ A LOT ABOUT REAL SCIENCE BACK THEN AND DESPITE MY HEAD INJURY STILL RECALL MY FIRST INTRODUCTION IN 1966 TO THE BRANCH OF MATHEMATICS CALLED TOPOLOGY. BE PATIENT. YOU'LL NEED TO KNOW SOME TOPOLOGY TO UNDERSTAND WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE. TIME-LIFE BOOKS HAD A SCIENCE SERIES IN PRINT BACK THEN, AND A FRIEND OF MINE HAD A COMPLETE SET WHICH HE HAD NEVER READ. I GOT HOLD OF THE ONE ON MATHEMATICS AND WITHIN WEEKS, SEVERAL OF MY DOTS CAME LOOSE. WHY? BECAUSE THERE WAS A SECTION IN THAT BOOK WHICH DEALT WITH TOPOLOGY. IN IT, THEY PROVED THAT TO A TOPOLOGIST, A DOUGHNUT WAS INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM A COFFEE MUG (EVER SEEN A TOPOLOGIST BREAK HIS DENTURES TRYING TO EAT A COFFEE MUG? NOW YOU KNOW WHY!) AND IN WHICH THEY SHOWED YOU HOW TO REMOVE YOUR VEST WITHOUT FIRST TAKING OFF YOUR OVERCOAT. (THEY CLAIMED THAT THIS WAS PROOF THAT THE VEST WAS REALLY ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE OVERCOAT ALL ALONG.) TO THIS DAY I DO NOT CLAIM TO KNOW WHY THE CONTEMPLATION OF THAT PARTICULAR CONCEPT COULD SOFTEN THE GLUE THAT HELD MY DOTS IN PLACE EVERY BIT AS EFFECTIVELY AS THE HALLUCINOGENS THAT MY FRIENDS WERE FRYING THEIR BRAINS WITH AT THE TIME, BUT, WELL, THERE IT IS. WHAT THE HELL. MAYBE IT WAS THE SKULL FRACTURE.

A GUY I KNEW IN THE EIGHTH GRADE DID A BOOK REPORT ON THE TIME-LIFE MATH BOOK AND GOT UP IN FRONT OF MRS. BALDWIN'S ENGLISH CLASS AND DEMONSTRATED THE VEST-AND-OVERCOAT TRICK. WE WERE ASTONISHED. HE LATER WENT ON TO SHOOT ALL THE DOTS OFF HIS DICE IN HIGH SCHOOL; I IMAGINE HE'S WANDERING AROUND THE STREETS OF SOME LARGE CITY WEARING A SHABBY VEST AND OVERCOAT, PERFORMING HIS TRICK FOR ANYONE WHO WILL TOSS A COIN HIS WAY AND WATCH. AS COUNTERINTUITIVE AS THAT STUNT WAS, IT WAS SURPASSED IN SHEER STRANGENESS BY THAT TOPOLOGICAL SET-PIECE, THE MÖBIUS STRIP - THE FAMOUS ENDLESS LOOP WITH ONLY ONE SIDE AND ONE EDGE. IT FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN THE TOPOLOGY SECTION OF THE AFOREMENTIONED BOOK, AND I WAS SO TAKEN BY IT THAT CONSTRUCTING MÖBIUS STRIPS OUT OF PAPER WAS ONE OF MY MAIN RECREATIONAL PASTTIMES ON THOSE OCCASIONS WHEN I WAS OUT OF SCHOOL WITH A COUD. I'D SIT DOWN IN FRONT OF THE TUBES AND CONSTRUCT MÖBIUS STRIPS WHILE WATCHING QUEEN FOR A DAY. I'D MAKE STACKS OF THEM AND EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT WAYS OF CUTTING THEM UP TO SEE WHAT SORTS OF TOPOLOGICAL KNOTS I COULD COME UP WITH. I GUESS THIS DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO REALLY WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE (HA! THAT WAS A LIE! YOU HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT IT HAS TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE!)

THE MÖBIUS STRIP WAS ACTUALLY USED IN A WORK OF MODERN ART - A LITHOGRAPH BY THE DUTCH PRINTMAKER, M.C. ESCHER, WHOSE INTRICATELY INTERLOCKING REPRESENTATIONS OF GEOMETRICALLY IMPOSSIBLE BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPES, ANIMALS AND PEOPLE FOUND THEIR WAY ONTO MORE THAN ONE BLACKLIGHT POSTER FROM THE EARLY '70'S. ONE OF MY FAVORITE ESCHER THEMES IS THE GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION OF ONE STYLIZED ANIMAL INTO ANOTHER USING A REPETITIVE TILING PATTERN INTO WHICH SUBTLE CHANGES ARE SUCCESSIVELY INTRODUCED UNTIL THE TRANSFORMATION IS COMPLETE. YES, IT'S PROBABLY TRUE THAT ESCHER'S ARTWORK LIFTED A FEW OF MY POORLY-EPOXIED DOTS DURING

MY EARLY COLLEGE DAYS, BECAUSE LIKE LARRY BROWN (WHO PROVED BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT IN THE 8TH GRADE THAT THE VEST REALLY WAS OUTSIDE THE COAT), ESCHER COULD PUT YOU INSIDE AND OUTSIDE A BUILDING SIMULTANEOUSLY; COULD TRANSFORM "UP" INTO "DOWN" WITH A FEW TRICKS OF SHADING RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PAGE, AND CHANGE BELIEF INTO DISBELIEF WITH A FEW INK MARKS ON A PIECE OF PAPER. ALL THIS, AND MUCH MORE, DONE RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES WITHOUT MIRRORS - OR SMOKE. HEAVY STUFF FOR A FRESHMAN AWAY FROM HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

ESCHER'S MÖBIUS STRIP LITHOGRAPH WAS PERFORATED, SO THE BEHOLDER COULD SEE BOTH THE STRIP AND WHAT WAS BEHIND IT IN THE SCENE. THE STRIP WAS POPULATED WITH GIGANTIC ANTS WHO CRAWLED ENOUGH AROUND AND AROUND IT. IMAGINE THAT IN DAY-GLO COLORS ON A DEAD BLACK BACKGROUND, STUCK TO THE CEILING OF A DORMITORY ROOM AND ILLUMINATED BY A DEEP PURPLE FLUORESCENT LIGHT FIXTURE THAT TURNS THE TEETH OF UNDERGRADUATES MILKY BLUE WHILE THE "SPARE CHANGE" JAM FROM THE JEFFERSON AIRPLANE'S "AFTER BATHING AT BAXTER'S" ALBUM PLAYS IN THE BACKGROUND ON ONE OF THOSE CHEESY PORTABLE STEREO RECORD PLAYERS WITH THE TURNTABLE THAT FOLDS DOWN, THE SPEAKERS THAT SWING OUT AND DETACH (FOR DRAMATIC STEREO SEPARATION) AND A NICKEL SCOTCH-TAPED TO THE END OF THE TONE ARM TO KEEP THE STYLUS (FLIP TO ONE SIDE FOR 33/45 RPM, FLIP TO THE OTHER FOR 78) FROM SKATING ACROSS THE GROOVES. SOUNDS LIKE FUN, DOESN'T IT? SAY, HAS ANYBODY GOT A BOTTLE OF SPANÁDA? YES, THIS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE. CAN YOU GUESS WHAT IT IS? WHOOPS! THERE'S A DOT ON THE FLOOR! DID ANYBODY LOSE ONE?

BUT ALL THAT WAS WHILE I WAS STILL DRIVING A 36 HP VOLKSWAGEN. MY FIRST REAL ENCOUNTER WITH AN ELECTRIC BASS WAS, AT THAT POINT, SEVERAL MONTHS IN THE FUTURE, AND I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO PRETEND TO BE A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY THEN. MY GOODNESS, HOW TIMES DO CHANGE. NOW I'VE EVEN GOT ME FOOLED INTO THINKING I'M A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY, MY ABORTIVE CAREER AS A BASSIST AND GRAD STUDENT (DOTS IN ONE HAND, JAR OF RUBBER CEMENT IN THE OTHER) IS DIM HISTORY, AND I DRIVE A CAR IN WHICH TWO VW BEETLES CAN PARK. THE PORTABLE STEREO IS NOW A NON-PORTABLE CD PLAYER, WHICH SHARES A PRETTY GOOD PAIR OF JVC SPEAKERS WITH A RECEIVER TUNED MOSTLY TO NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO. THE SPANÁDA HAS GIVEN WAY TO RIDGE 1978 HOWELL MOUNTAIN LATE HARVEST ZINFANDEL, AND THE DORM ROOM IS NOW A HOUSE ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE RIVER, THREE MILES FROM THE PRACTICE ROOM. AND IT'S TIME TO DRIVE THE CADDY HOME.

LIKE ALL HEAVY DETROIT IRON FROM THE 1960'S, STARTING IS EASY. IF YOU HAVE FUEL AND SPARK, IT WILL START. SPARK YOU TAKE FOR GRANTED - THERE'S NONE OF THIS ELECTRONIC ADVANCE WITH "VACUUM AND OIL TEMPERATURE HOLDOFF OR HOLDON MODULATED BY THE OCTANE OF THE FUEL DIVIDED BY THE PHASE OF THE MOON MULTIPLIED BY THE COLOR OF YOUR MONEY" GARBAGE, JUST A VACUUM ADVANCE BISCUIT TUCKED UNDER THE DISTRIBUTOR WITH A COPPER PIPE LEADING TO A FITTING IN THE INTAKE MANIFOLD. THE FUEL PART OF THE FORMULA IS JUST AS

EASY: YOU GIVE IT SEVERAL GOOD TROMPS ON THE GAS PEDAL TO ENGAGE THE ACCELERATOR PUMPS AND THEREBY DUMP SEVERAL SHOT GLASSES OF RAW GASOLINE RIGHT DOWN INTO THE INTAKE MANIFOLD SO IT WILL START PROMPTLY. (TRY THIS ON YOUR SAAB TURSO CABRIOLET AND NOT ONLY WILL YOU BE CALLING THE PARTS DEPARTMENT OF YOUR LOCAL SAAB DEALER ON YOUR CELLULAR PHONE TO ORDER A NEW ENGINE, BUT ALSO THE SWEDISH AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS WILL PRESENT A DRAFT RESOLUTION BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY SEEKING TO HAVE YOUR WINOHAM HILL CD COLLECTION RUBBED WITH A HARSH ABRASIVE.) AND AS IN ALL HEAVY DETROIT IRON FROM THE 1960'S, THE TECHNIQUE WORKS, AND AS THE ENGINE SETTLES DOWN TO FAST IDLE YOU BUCKLE IN AND START DOWN THE PREFLIGHT CHECKLIST. EVEN DURING WARMUP, THE 472 GULPS DOWN FOUR TIMES THE FUEL FLOW OF THE SAAB, SO YOU DO NOT DALLY AROUND.

DRIVING A CAR THAT GETS MUNDIAIS CAUGHT IN ITS WHEEL WELLS DOES REQUIRE SOME ADJUSTMENTS TO ONE'S STYLE. THIS PARTICULAR HEARSE IS A LANDAM-STYLE COACH, WHICH MEANS IT HAS NO SIDE WINDOWS IN THE REAR EXCEPT FOR THOSE IN THE DOORS, WHICH ARE ALMOST TOTALLY OBSCURED WITH HEAVY VELVET DRAPES. VISIBILITY IS POOR; YOU SPEND SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF TIME UNABLE TO SEE YOUR NEIGHBORS ON THE ROAD. THIS, COUPLED WITH THE SHEER SIZE OF THE CAR, MEANS THAT SUCCESSFUL PILOTAGE REQUIRES AN ODD MIXTURE OF FINESSE, BRUTE FORCE, CAREFUL PLANNING (ESPECIALLY WHEN TRYING TO GET INTO OR, IN THIS CASE, OUT OF A PARKING SPACE IN THE DARK) AND TELEPATHY. LUCKILY MOST OTHER DRIVERS CUT YOU A LOT OF SLACK, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU PUT YOUR HIGH BEAMS ON.

BAD WEATHER ONLY MAKES THINGS WORSE. ORDINARILY, YOU'D SWITCH OVER TO INSTRUMENTS AND POWER YOUR WAY THROUGH, BUT THE CANNY DOESN'T HAVE EVEN SO MUCH AS AN ARTIFICIAL HORIZON OR A GYROCOMPASS TO HELP YOU STEER - LET ALONE A GLIDESLOPE RECEIVER, OMNIRANGE OR LORAN LIKE OTHER CRAFT IN ITS SIZE RANGE. YOU HAVE TO RELY ON THE SEAT OF YOUR PANTS AND THE FEEL OF THE WIND ON YOUR FACE (ESPECIALLY WHEN THE WINDSHIELD MISTS UP AND YOU HAVE TO CRANK DOWN THE SIDE WINDOW AND STICK YOUR HEAD OUT INTO THE FREEZING FOG TO KEEP FROM DRIVING RIGHT OFF THE ROAD). JUST GUESS IF THIS HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

BY NOW THE ENGINE IS READY TO GO AND SO YOU TUNE IN THE TELEPATHY AND GINGERLY BACK OUT OF THE PARKING SLOT. IT'S COLD IN THE CAB, AND THE DRIVE HOME IS TOO SHORT FOR THE HEATER TO COME FULLY ON LINE, SO ALL THE WHILE YOU HAVE TO MANUALLY MOP THE MIST OFF THE WINDSHIELD - A PIECE OF GLASS WHICH SEEMS AT TIMES LIKE THIS TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY BIGGER THAN AN OLYMPIC-SIZED PING PONG TABLE (AND ABOUT AS TRANSPARENT). BY THE TIME YOU'VE GOT THE INSIDE CLEARED OFF, THE SIDE WINDOWS ARE STEAMED UP, AND BY THE TIME YOU'RE DONE WITH THEM THE WINDSHIELD IS OPAQUE AGAIN. WHOOPS! SORRY. THAT WATER IS ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE WINDSHIELD. SO WITH WIPERS ON YOU EASE YOUR WAY DOWN THE ALLEY, DEAD SLOW. THE REAR WINDOW IS USELESS WITH CONDENSATE AND, AT TEN FEET AWAY, QUITE OUT OF REACH, SO YOU ARE FORCED TO RELY ON THE FOUR INCH DIAMETER BUSTER MIRRORS THAT YOU'VE STUCK ON THE MIRROR MOUNTS. THESE MIRRORS SHOULD CARRY THE LABEL "OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THEY APPEAR" (BUT THAT IS ANOTHER STORY, ONE WHICH HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE). DOES THIS HAVE ANYTHING

TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

DRIVING SIX THOUSAND POUNDS OF MUTANT CADILLAC IS NOT AS HARD AS I HAVE LED YOU TO BELIEVE. THE CAR HAS A REALLY GOOD AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION AND THE POWER STEERING HAS SUCH HIGH GAIN THAT YOU CAN SPIN THE WHEEL FROM LOCK TO LOCK WITH TWO FINGERS AT ALMOST ANY FORWARD SPEED YOU CARE TO CHOOSE. AND THE BRAKES! A MERE TAP OF THE TOE AND YOU'VE LOCKED 'EM UP. "ROAD FEEL" WAS A DIRTY WORD IN THE DETROIT OF 1968, WHEN THE HOLY GRAIL OF AUTOMOTIVE ENGINEERING WAS TO MAKE THE EXPERIENCE OF DRIVING COMPLETELY INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM WHAT YOU'D FEEL SITTING IN YOUR LIVING ROOM AFTER A HEAVY MEAL. FOR THIS TO BE TRUE, THE ENGINE HAS TO BE RUNNING, OF COURSE. IF THE ENGINE DIES WHILE YOU'RE UNDER WAY, THE ABOVE-DESCRIBED SENSATION IS REPLACED BY SOMETHING MORE AKIN TO BEING HANDCUFFED TO THE RAIL OF THE TITANIC AT ABOUT THE TIME WHEN THE GUY IN THE CROW'S NEST DROPS HIS BINOCULARS AND WETS HIS PANTS. ONE TIME I WAS DRIVING IN TO TOWN AND AS I COASTED DOWN OFF THE BRIDGE TOWARDS THE STOPLIGHT AT 2ND STREET, THE ENGINE DIED. THE POWER STEERING QUIT, AND INSTANTLY I WAS FIGHTING THE WHEEL WITH ALL MY STRENGTH, TRYING TO TURN LEFT ONTO 2ND. I GOT TWO GOOD STABS AT THE BRAKES BEFORE THE VACUUM BOOST WAS SPENT AND I HAD TO STOP THE DRIFTING BARGE BY WEDGING BOTH KNEES UNDER THE DASH AND MASHING DOWN ON THE BRAKE PEDAL WITH TWO FEET. I MADE IT TO THE CURB AND RESTARTED THE ENGINE WITHOUT INCIDENT - JUST AS WELL, SINCE LIKE THE TITANIC, THE CADDY ALSO LACKS THE RIGHT NUMBER OF LIFE BOATS. DEEP DOWN, THIS PROBABLY HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.

TONIGHT THE ROUTE HOME TAKES YOU ACROSS ONE CITY BLOCK VIA AN ALLEY LINED WITH DUMPSTERS RUNNING BEHIND THE GROCERY STORE WHERE YOU USUALLY BUY THE BEER THAT LUBRICATES THE REHEARSALS. YOU POP OUT ONTO VAN BUREN AND HANG A SHARP LEFT HEADING EAST ON A SHORT CROSSWIND FINAL WITH WIPERS ON, DEFROST ON, COWL VENTS OPEN, TWO CLICKS OF FLAPS, GEAR DOWN AND LOCKED. THERE IS NO GUIDESLOPE, NO MICROWAVE LANDING SYSTEM, NOBODY IN THE CROW'S NEST AND NO OTHER TRAFFIC IN THE PATTERN. HAS ANYBODY REPORTED ICEBERGS? THERE'S NO RADIO IN THE CADDY, SO EVEN IF SOMEONE HAD, YOU'D NEVER KNOW; AND WITHOUT A RADIO, THERE'S NO WAY THE CHAP IN THE CONTROL TOWER COULD TALK YOU DOWN OUT OF THE FOG. NOT THAT IT MATTERS. THERE'S NO CONTROL TOWER, EITHER. NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO HAVE SMOKE IN YOUR EYES, IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED. WHY? HERE'S WHY:

BECAUSE IF YOU DO, THE RAMP UP OFF OF STREET LEVEL AND ONTO THE WEST END OF THE BRIDGE BEGINS TO BEAR A STRONG RESEMBLANCE TO A CERTAIN TOPOLOGICAL ABSTRACTION (AM I WEARING A VEST TONIGHT? YES, A DOWN-FILLED VEST UNDER MY OVERCOAT, AND WHY DOES MY OVERCOAT LOOK LIKE A RED VELVET SLEEVED CAPE WITH ERMINE TRIM?) WITH BUT ONE EDGE, ONE SIDE AND NO END. AS YOU APPROACH THE RAMP, THE DE-ICING SYSTEM BEGINS TO FAIL AND ICE STARTS BUILDING UP ON YOUR CONTROL SURFACES, DEGRADING THE CAREFULLY-DESIGNED CONTOURS OF THE HEARSE BODYWORK, AND YOU BEGIN LOSING LIFT. YOU NOW REALIZE YOU HAVE ONLY ONE SHOT AT THIS HAZARDOUS MANEUVER, THE AUTOMOTIVE EQUIVALENT OF TAKING OFF ONE'S VEST WITHOUT FIRST REMOVING THE OVERCOAT.

ODD SHAPES OF FOG SHOT THROUGH WITH STREAKS OF ICY RAIN SWIRL IN YOUR LANDING LIGHTS AND STREAM BACK PAST THE WINDSHIELD, WHERE THE WIPERS ARE DOING THE WAA WAA TUSI, WITH AMBIGUOUS RESULTS. STILL NO WORD FROM THE CROW'S NEST. WHY SHOULD THERE BE? BY THIS TIME YOU SHOULD BE DONE UNBUTTONING THE ERMINE-TRIMMED OVERCOAT AND HAD BETTER BE STARTED UNBUTTONING THE VEST UNDERNEATH. THE BRIDGE DRAWS CLOSER, AND THE RAMP REARS UP AHEAD OF YOU, A MASS OF ASPHALT PATCHES AND ROAD KILLS WHICH BLENDS TOGETHER INTO A FRACTAL TESSELLATION OF INTERLOCKING PRE-PHOENICIAN DON MARTIN GNOMES WITH GNARLED KNUCKLES AND THEIR NOSES UP EACH OTHER'S ASSHOLES, DOING THE FUNKY BOOGALOO IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS ACROSS THE WIDTH OF THE ROAD - WHICH NOW HAS, MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT, ONLY ONE EDGE AND ONE SIDE. REALITY ITSELF HAS DEVELOPED A FRACTAL QUALITY IN WHICH IT LOOKS THE SAME AT ANY MAGNIFICATION AND IN WHICH IT DOES NOT COMPLETELY FILL THREE DIMENSIONS. GRADUALLY BUT INEXORABLY THE MÖBIUS MANNEBROT UNDER YOUR 8.50 X 15 8-PLY AMBULANCE SPECIALS TRANSFORMS ITSELF NUANCE BY NUANCE, TILE BY TILE INTO A NEW AND RECURSIVELY AIRRIGHT PATTERN OF ROAD-KILL CROSSUMS AND SWASTIKAS - THE IDAHO STATE FLAG! NOW YOU ARE ASCENDING THE RAMP. SWITCH ON THE HIGH BEAMS, THEN REACH UNDER THE OVERCOAT WITH YOUR RIGHT HAND AND PULL OPEN THE LEFT ARM HOLE OF THE VEST.

THE BRIDGE IS REALLY A CANTILEVER TRUSS MADE UP OF RIVETTED STRAP STEEL BUILT INTO BOX-SECTION GIRDERS, CROSSBRACED WITH THROUGH BARS THAT ARE TIED TOGETHER WITH HUGE TURNBUCKLES. YOUR HIGH BEAMS ILLUMINATE ALL THIS IRONWORK ABOVE AND TO EITHER SIDE OF THE DECK, IRONWORK AND RIVETS WHICH DEFINE SPACE BUT DO NOT QUITE FILL IT AND WHICH STRETCH AWAY TO THE VANISHING POINT IN REPETITIVE DETAIL - A RECTILINEAR REPRESENTATION OF THE CENTRAL PROP FROM A FAILED PRIME TIME SCIENCE FICTION TV SERIES. AT THE LOOSE EDGES OF YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS, ACTORS IN TURTLENECKS AND SHOES WITH MAN-MADE UPPERS LOB SMOKE BOMBS IN BETWEEN THE GIRDERS, BLOWING SMOKY ICEBERGS INTO THE BLACK SPACE AHEAD OF YOUR HEADLIGHTS. LEE MERIWETHER WRESTLES FRANTICALLY WITH HER CONTROL LEVERS, AND THE WESTON VU METER RESPONDS BY JITTERING UP AN EXTRA 3dB'S. THE GIRDERS ZIG-ZAG UP AND DOWN, BACK AND FORTH AS YOU DRIVE THROUGH. YOU BEND YOUR LEFT ELBOW TO BRING YOUR LEFT HAND IN TOWARDS YOUR LEFT SHOULDER.

AS EACH GIRDER GROWS NEAR, THE ZIG-ZAG PATTERN OF INDIVIDUAL IRON STRAPS WITHIN IT BECOMES VISIBLE AT THE SAME RATE THAT WHOLE NEW GIRDERS APPEAR AT THE LIMIT OF THE HIGH BEAMS. THIS GOES ON FOR SOME TIME. YOU MIGHT HEAR BRAZEN SAXOPHONE MUSIC IN THE BUZZ OF WET TIRES ON VERY WORN PAVEMENT, PERHAPS VERY FAINTLY, BUT THEN AGAIN, MAYBE NOT. NEXT YOU PULL BACK THE OVERCOAT SO THE LEFT ARMHOLE OF THE VEST IS EXPOSED AND STICK YOUR LEFT HAND THROUGH THE ARMHOLE.

TOPOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, IT MIGHT NOT BE POSSIBLE AT THIS POINT TO PROVE THAT YOU ARE NOT ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE TUNNEL BUT THAT'S JUST AS WELL SINCE YOU WOULD JUST AS SOON NOT PERFORM THE AUTOMOTIVE EQUIVALENT OF BREAKING YOUR DENTURES ON A COFFEE CUP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BRIDGE. THROUGH FRACTAL GAPS IN THE ROADWAY YOU CAN VISUALIZE BLACK, SWIRLING,

ICY COLD WATER THICK WITH SILT, FAST MOVING AND DOTTED WITH BROKEN-OFF TREE LIMBS AND CHUNKS OF TIMBER THE SIZE OF RAILROAD TIES THAT SNAG TOGETHER AND COLLECT AGAINST THE UPSTREAM SIDE OF THE SINGLE PIER WHICH SUPPORTS THE ONCE-PIVOTING CENTER SECTION. NOW PUSH YOUR LEFT ARM THROUGH THE LEFT ARMHOLE OF THE VEST SO THAT YOUR LEFT ARM IS FREE OF THE VEST AND THE OVERCOAT IS NOW PARTIALLY THREADED THROUGH THE LEFT ARMHOLE. ITS O.K. IF YOU WANT TO STEER WITH YOUR KNEES DURING THESE MANEUVERS; YOU'LL FIND THE ALMOST EFFORTLESS POWER STEERING A GODSEND. YES, IT IS TRUE THAT THE ENTIRE CENTER SECTION OF THE BRIDGE USED TO ROTATE SO STEAMBOATS COULD PASS, BUT IT'S BEEN BOLTED DOWN IMMOVABLY FOR YEARS, A FACT WHICH FLITS REASSURINGLY THROUGH YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS EACH TIME YOU DRIVE ACROSS. NO WAY COULD IT POSSIBLY ROTATE, ESPECIALLY NOT NOW. NOPE. BOLTED DOWN GOOD AND TIGHT. I'M SURE THEY CHECK THOSE BOLTS ONCE A WEEK, AT LEAST. PROBABLY MORE OFTEN THAN THAT WHEN THE WEATHER'S BAD.

THEN AGAIN, TRACING ONE EDGE OF A MÖBIUS STRIP WITH YOUR FINGER WILL EVENTUALLY BRING YOU BACK TO YOUR STARTING POINT - BUT ON THE OPPOSITE EDGE - AND MOVING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. NOT A CHANCE OF THAT HAPPENING HERE, THOUGH. AFTER ALL, THE MÖBIUS STRIP IS A TWO-DIMENSIONAL OBJECT FOLDED BACK ON ITSELF BY PHYSICALLY TWISTING IT THROUGH THE THIRD DIMENSION. THERE IS NO THREE-DIMENSIONAL ANALOGY TO THE MÖBIUS STRIP (IGNORING THE KLEIN BOTTLE, SINCE AT LEAST ONE CAST-IRON RULE OF TOPOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION WAS BROKEN IN CONSTRUCTING IT) BECAUSE SPATIAL DIMENSIONS STOP AT THREE IN THIS PARTICULAR UNIVERSE. RIGHT? I'M PRETTY SURE THEY DO. NOW WORK THE FREE LEFT SIDE OF THE VEST AROUND YOUR BACK BY PULLING THE OVERCOAT THROUGH THE LEFT ARMHOLE OF THE VEST. CONTINUE STEERING WITH YOUR KNEES UNTIL THE VEST HAS BEEN WORKED ALL THE WAY AROUND TO YOUR RIGHT SIDE.

THE EAST END OF THE BRIDGE IS VISIBLE NOW AS A FEATURELESS BLACK SQUARE FRAMED WITH GIRDERS. IT GROWS LARGER. IS THIS THE END OF THE MÖBIUS STRIP? WHAT IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SOLID BLACK WALL WHICH NOW FILLS THE WINDSHIELD? CAN YOU PROVE FROM A TOPOLOGICAL STANDPOINT, USING NOTHING MORE THAN A STRAIGHTEDGE AND A KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE, THAT THE BRIDGE DID NOT INDEED ROTATE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY DEGREES AS YOU DROVE ACROSS IT BUT STAYED SECURELY BOLTED IN PLACE AND AS A RESULT YOU ARE NOW ABOUT TO ENTER RURAL WESTERN LINN COUNTY ON STATE HIGHWAY 34? IF SO, ARE YOU THEN SURE BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT THAT THE DARK AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL IS ONLY A TRICK OF LIGHT AND SHADOW AND NOT, AS YOU STRONGLY SUSPECT, A BLACK VELVET MEMBRANE STRETCHED ACROSS THE END OF THE BRIDGE? USE OF A COMPASS IS PERMITTED IN THIS PROOF BUT IF YOU REALLY KNEW YOUR TOPOLOGY YOU WOULDN'T NEED IT. WHILE YOU'RE WORKING ON THAT, STEER WITH YOUR KNEES AGAIN AND PULL THE REST OF THE OVERCOAT, INCLUDING YOUR RIGHT ARM, THROUGH THE LEFT ARM HOLE OF THE VEST.

IF IT REALLY IS A MEMBRANE, WILL YOU BURST THROUGH IT AND KEEP GOING, LIKE A CONTESTANT IN A WARPED MOBIL FUEL ECONOMY RUN WHERE THE FIRST DRIVER TO RUN OUT OF GAS WINS A MATCHED SET OF AMERICAN TOURISTER LUGGAGE, A BOTTLE OF "JUNGLE GARDENIA" BY TUVACHE (THE FAVORITE FRAGRANCE

OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN), A TANKFUL OF KNOCK-O-MATIC LOW LEAN SLIGHTLY IRREGULAR GASOLINE TO DRIVE HOME ON, A MEMORABLE TRIP DOWN SIX FLIGHTS OF CONCRETE STAIRS ON ROLLER SKATES ONCE YOU ARRIVE AND A BIG BASKET OF HOT BUTTERED BANNANIOS FOR AFTERWARD? CAN YOU TAP YOUR COFFAINS TOGETHER AND SHOUT "THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME" LOUDLY ENOUGH TO EITHER PIN THE NEEDLE ON JACK BAILEY'S EMPATHY METER OR FOR DRS. SWAIN AND MAC GREGOR TO HEAR AND RESPOND BY YANKING THEIR CONTROL LEVERS ONE MORE TIME, WITH FINGERS CROSSED FOR LUCK, HOPING FOR THE JACKPOT WHILE THE WATER GOING OVER HOOPER DAM SLOWS DOWN AND ALL THE NEON IN LAS VEGAS BEGINS TO FLICKER? CAN YOU DEMONSTRATE FROM FIRST PRINCIPLES THAT YOU WILL NOT, IN FACT, BE FUMBLING IN TIME BY THE BROWNOUT AND COME TO REST ON THE FOREDECK OF THE TITANIC, HANDCUFFED TO THE WHEEL OF A 1968 SUPERIOR CADILLAC LAMPAN FUNERAL COACH WITH EXTENSION TABLE, WEARING A TURTLENECK SWEATER UNDER A VEST (THE FREE END OF WHICH SHOULD BY NOW BE HANGING LOOSE IN FRONT OF YOU WHILE YOUR RIGHT ARM IS STILL THREADED THROUGH THE RIGHT ARMHOLE OF THE VEST - AND YOUR GRIMME-TRIMMED RED VELVET OVERCOAT STILL ON, OF COURSE) WITH A DOUGHNUT IN ONE HAND AND A COFFEE CUP IN THE OTHER, STEERING WITH YOUR KNEES, FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE IMPACT?

SURPRISE. YOU HAVE PIERCED THE MEMBRANE AND ARE NOW DRIVING ACROSS THE DUSTY, DESERTED STAGE SET OF "QUEEN FOR A DAY", BOWLING OVER FORGOTTEN STACKS OF SUITCASES AND CRATES OF CHEAP PERFUME WHICH SPIT OPEN, SHOWERING THE HEARSE WITH THE SAME PLEASANT FLORAL SCENT WORN BY YOUR SECOND GRADE SCHOOLTEACHER IN 1960. THE VOLATILE MIXTURE MELTS THE ICE OFF YOUR CONTROL SURFACES AND THE AILERONS BEGIN TO RESPOND AGAIN, TO YOUR ENORMOUS RELIEF. WITH THE STALL WARNING HORN SCREAMING IN YOUR EAR YOU EXIT STAGE LEFT AT PERILOUSLY LOW ALTITUDE THROUGH A ROLL-UP DOOR AND ARE NOW RAPIDLY BUILDING UP SPEED IN A DARK ALLEY BETWEEN TWO ENDLESS ROWS OF DISUSED WAREHOUSES BEARING SIGNS WHICH READ "NBC SITCOMS, 1962-64", "MISC. ACTION ADVENTURE 1958-63", "CBS HORSE OPERAS 1961-69", AND THE LIKE. AHEAD IN THE RAINY MURK IS A GUARD SHACK, INSIDE IT SITS AN EIGHTH-GRADER WITH THICK GLASSES, AN OVERCOAT AND A VEST, DIPPING A DOUGHNUT INTO A CUP OF COFFEE. HE LOOKS UP FROM HIS MATHEMATICS TEXTBOOK AS YOU DRAW NEAR, AND PULLS THE STRING ATTACHED TO THE RED AND WHITE GATE BARRIER SO IT SWINGS UP AND OUT OF YOUR WAY. BUT INSTEAD OF BLASTING THROUGH AT V_{max} YOU HIT THOSE MARVELOUS POWER BRAKES AND SKID TO A STANDSTILL OPPOSITE HIS LITTLE WINDOW. YOU ROLL YOURS DOWN AS HE SLIDES HIS OPEN, AND YOU ASK HIM JUST ONE QUESTION:

"HOW DO I GET THE VEST THE REST OF THE WAY OFF?"

"EASY", HE REPLIES. "REACH ALL THE WAY INTO THE RIGHT SLEEVE OF THE OVERCOAT WITH YOUR LEFT HAND UNTIL YOU CAN GRASP THE VEST, THEN PULL IT OFF YOUR RIGHT ARM BY EXTRACTING IT OUT THROUGH THE RIGHT SLEEVE OF THE OVERCOAT, THEREBY PROVING IT WAS OUTSIDE THE OVERCOAT ALL ALONG."

AND THERE YOU ARE. THAT'S WHY I DON'T SMOKE AND DRIVE.