

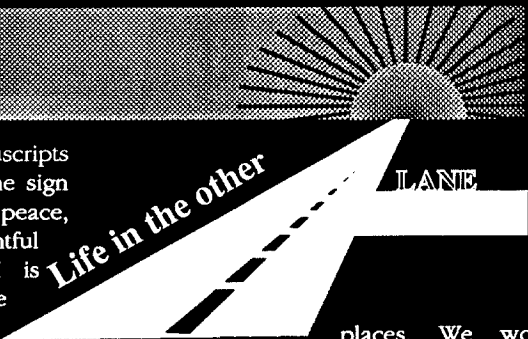
According to all of the learned manuscripts on the subject, I was born under the sign that is supposed to stand for peace, harmony, balance and quiet, thoughtful negotiation (at this point, if TH is proofreading this he is convulsive with laughter). Those of my ilk are alleged to sort of float through life's turmoil with a serenity of spirit, eradicating discord and confusion with liberal doses of gossamer and fluff (TH is now suffering from cardiac arrest). We can see the pitfalls of hasty judgment, set out to right wrongs with ombudsman like calm, find that elusive silver lining when all others see is ca-ca (poor man I think I've done him in).

Anyone who has been a student of this space over the past few years can probably surmise that astrological interpretation, at least in my case, has left abundant room for error. I think we can also agree that a more than playful level of confusion and disarray seems to follow me like fleas follow furry animals. Astrologists would be quick to offer lengthy disclaiming homilies on the importance of rising signs and the position of the moon at my birth. I have long since developed a more logical explanation. It all is an extension of the behavior I exhibited at age four when I allowed my brother Joe to play barber on Palm Sunday morning. It seemed like such a good idea until mom got home and found her baby daughter transformed into a Hari Krishna.

Well, all of that is a very convoluted way of reporting that TH and I have just embarked on another reincarnation project. To put it harmoniously, if you thought rejuvenating the MASS was humorous, the next few months ought to have you on a respirator.

A couple of months back, I reported that TH and I had started the serious quest for a replacement for Chateau Walrich. Life on Long Island's busiest thoroughfare was fast becoming intolerable with nonstop six lane traffic, construction of the new paint store next door and general mayhem. The litter and garbage tossed carelessly on my front stoop and gardens was becoming vicious. Half eaten hamburgers from the "Aluminum Room" (White Castle) across the street, used diapers, flyers advertising everything from palm reading to aerobics classes, broken beer bottles, soda cans and an occasional brown paper bag with an empty bottle of Thunderbird. If this was not incentive to move on, none existed.

The hunt for new digs began with TH looking at places while I looked at other



places. We would then convene, compare notes and go off to look at each other's finds if the general level of enthusiasm warranted. One of the first places we saw seemed exactly what we were looking for so, after due deliberation, TH revisited and made an offer that he felt reflected the size, age and general condition of the place. The owner, a man who obviously was blessed with x-ray vision and could see things in this place not apparent to the mere mortal's eye, acted so insulted by our offer that he refused to make a counter offer. Silly us, we were lead to believe that this was the process. When he became rude, TH

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departed silently wishing that voracious termites and copulating raccoons would descend on the place like the plague. I concurred — serenely.

After this set back we entered what I can now refer to as The Black Hole of House Hunting. This is a terrible place populated with beady eyed real estate agents — all direct descendants of beady eyed used car salesmen. They come in all sizes and shapes and personalities but the one trait they all share is the 7% tattooed on their forehead lest one forget what their take is in the transaction. These creatures of the netherworld are well trained in the non-answer, the, "Gee, I'll have to check on that and get back to you," or the, "Well, nobody has ever asked me that question before." No matter what they show you, there is already a binder on it, no matter what deficiency you point out, the seller will take care of it pronto. I never realized just how talented and creative I was until several

of these ferrets assured me how easy it would be to turn that filthy little mud room into a formal dining room with hot and cold running maid service. It sure made me wish my employers always had such kind evaluations.

After enduring more than our fair share of these wolves in sheep's clothing, we finally met one that gave us straight answers, did get back to us with additional data, had no visible tattoo and was the consummate gentleman who bent over (backwards and otherwise) to sell us a house. In the spirit of balanced reporting, I should mention that he was representing THE house.

According to the house hunters play book, prospective buyers should approach such a substantial purchase with cool logic, a critical eye and dispassionate reserve. While TH has this behavior down to a science, I deal on a more esoteric level — like the position of the morning sun. He asked the important questions: the taxes, the condition of the roof, the age of the boiler. I wondered out loud where I could plant my

dahlia. He made guttural noises like, "AH HA!" or, "HMMM?" or, "HO BOY." I squealed like a five year old on an Easter egg hunt. While the differences in our approach tended to keep the agent off balance (sort of like never knowing what base he was on, let alone what ball park he was playing in) we eventually found a common ground from which we could negotiate. To his infinite credit, Tom Seidl hung in there like a champ.

So, by the time you read this, TH and I will have imposed the challenge of moving our "stuff" on as many friends as will take the bait of ice cold beer. For the next few weeks we will be tripping over boxes at "Chateau Negative Cash Flow." There are several thousand good reasons for the name. Stay tuned.