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ROUTINELY SPEAKING

by Keith Long

A co-worker stepped into my office the other day and slumped into a chair under my non-working cuckoo clock.

"My life is boring," she said. "What a rut: eat, work, and sleep. It's the same old routine."

"Oh, sure," I said. "Boast if you must."

I've been trying to establish a routine for 20 years now with absolutely no result. I guess I'm just not a routine guy. Once upon a time, when I watched baseball the announcer sometimes would exclaim "that's a routine fly ball," or "that's a routine double-play ball." A routine double-play ball, I've come to understand, is a ball hit to either the shortstop or second baseman when there's a runner on first. The ball goes to second for the first out, and then to first for the second out. Double play.

Routine.

When I was in high school, our "routine" double-play ball went something like this:

One out, runner on second. The batter swings at a third strike in the dirt and the catcher misses the ball. The batter is allowed to run to first base and reaches safely, but the runner on second rounded third base too widely and a throw down there nabs him. One out. The batter, now on first, attempts to take second on the play at third but gets caught in a rundown and is eventually tagged out by the center fielder. Two outs.

Routine.

It's been that way ever since. For example, breakfast is supposed to be the most routine meal of the day. A long time ago a nutritionist asked me what I had for

breakfast.

"Everything," I responded.

"No," she said. "I mean this morning."

"Two eggs, one fried and one scrambled, toast, Spam, and apple juice."

"And yesterday?"

"A Hardee's sausage and egg biscuit and Mountain Dew."

"And the day before?"

"Salmon and crackers."

"And before?"

"Spaghettios."

Because of academics, my "routine" day never happens twice in a row. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I have an eight o'clock class, so I'm up and sort of about by 6:45. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I don't have a class under eleven o'clock, so I push the snoozer right up to 10 o'clock.

I've made getting to work an art in non-routine. For instance, this morning I got up at 6:53 a.m. sharp in order to meet my eight o'clock class. I stepped into the shower and attempted to cleanse myself, which wasn't easy since I'd left the lawn sprinkler running all night and the water pressure was minimal on the upstairs floor. I could cup my hands until I got enough liquid out of the shower spout to dampen one spot, and then I soaped it, and then I cupped my hands for enough water to rinse. About fifteen minutes into my shower, Anna turned off the sprinkler and



my day was enhanced by a sudden rush of frigid water which I was unable to dodge.

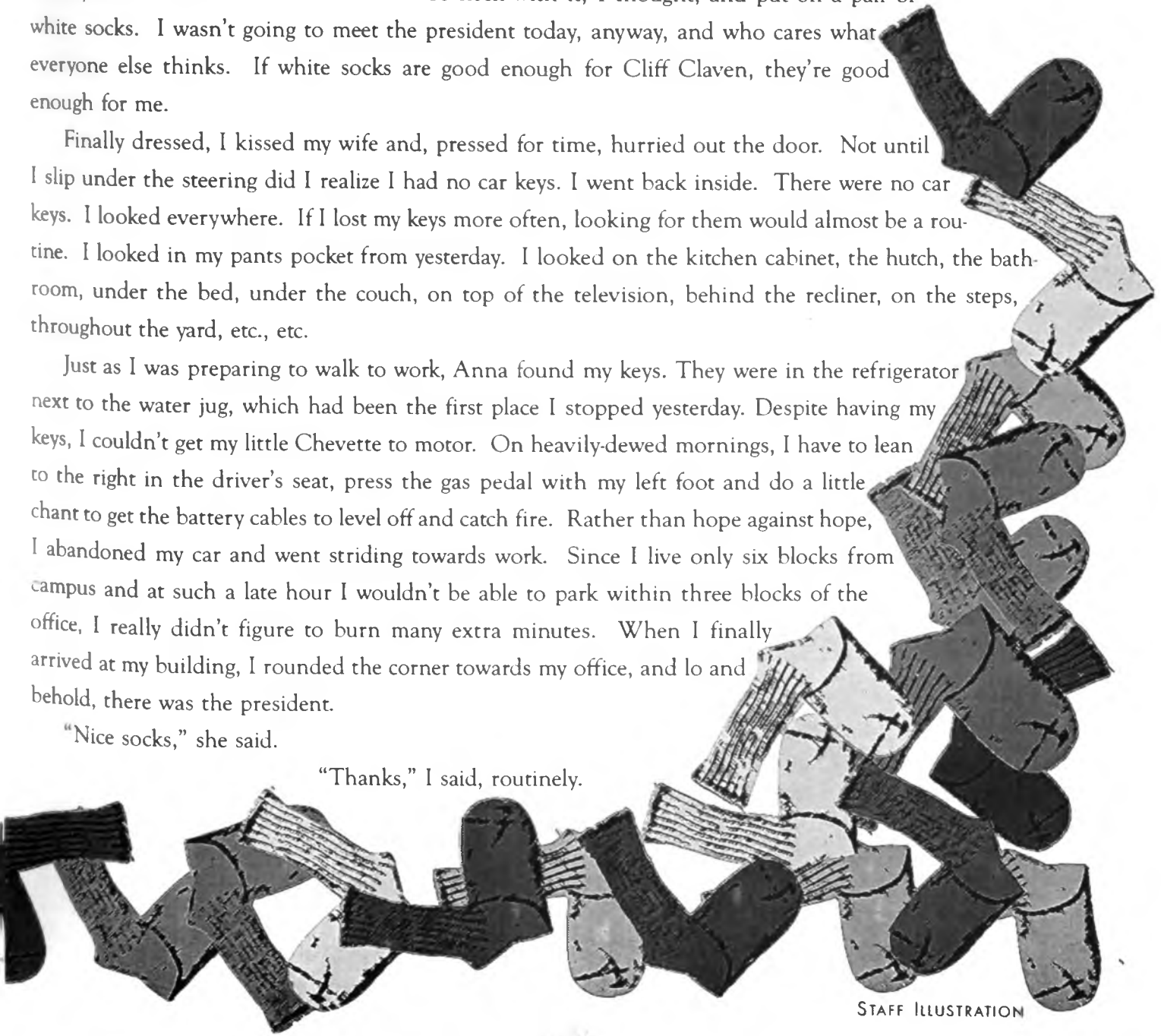
When I got out of the shower, I ran dripping downstairs to find a towel. By the time I located one in the downstairs bathroom, I was pretty much dry and in no need for it. I attempted to clothe myself at that point and was doing a pretty good job until it came to the socks. I rifled through the sock drawer only to find socks in twenty-seven different shades of brown. To heck with it, I thought, and put on a pair of white socks. I wasn't going to meet the president today, anyway, and who cares what everyone else thinks. If white socks are good enough for Cliff Claven, they're good enough for me.

Finally dressed, I kissed my wife and, pressed for time, hurried out the door. Not until I slip under the steering did I realize I had no car keys. I went back inside. There were no car keys. I looked everywhere. If I lost my keys more often, looking for them would almost be a routine. I looked in my pants pocket from yesterday. I looked on the kitchen cabinet, the hutch, the bathroom, under the bed, under the couch, on top of the television, behind the recliner, on the steps, throughout the yard, etc., etc.

Just as I was preparing to walk to work, Anna found my keys. They were in the refrigerator next to the water jug, which had been the first place I stopped yesterday. Despite having my keys, I couldn't get my little Chevette to motor. On heavily-dewed mornings, I have to lean to the right in the driver's seat, press the gas pedal with my left foot and do a little chant to get the battery cables to level off and catch fire. Rather than hope against hope, I abandoned my car and went striding towards work. Since I live only six blocks from campus and at such a late hour I wouldn't be able to park within three blocks of the office, I really didn't figure to burn many extra minutes. When I finally arrived at my building, I rounded the corner towards my office, and lo and behold, there was the president.

"Nice socks," she said.

"Thanks," I said, routinely.



STAFF ILLUSTRATION