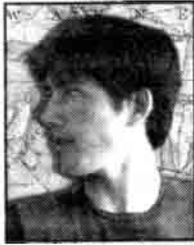


Save a Stupid, Worthless, No-Good Tree

by Chris Ladd
EDITORIAL EDITOR

We, us, most of the college-aged public reading this fine publication, belong to a virtual generation.

We fly on e-Tickets, send electronic mail, read magazines and newspapers online, and buy almost everything with a simple number encoded in a magnetic strip on a piece of plastic that corresponds to another number somewhere else that neatly sinks us into



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE, ME

debt without the mess of paper bills. We pay tolls wirelessly with tiny radio receivers glued to our windshields. Last month a state trooper pulled me over on I-87. I had neither my registration nor my insurance card, but the patrolman called it in, headquarters looked it up, and I was sent on my merry e-way. The man felt sorry for me, unburdened as I was with pieces of paper, so he gave me a yellow, crinkly speeding ticket to put in my glove box.

I lost that speeding ticket over a month ago. I found it yesterday; it is 32 days late. There is, no doubt, a warrant out for my arrest.

If you give me a piece of paper, I will lose it. If you tell me it is important, I will hide it, and find it again when it has outlived its usefulness in, say, six months. It will be on top of the refrigerator. I wish I could chalk this disability up to my digital-ity, my virtual-ness, generationally speaking, but my father has, and has had for 50 years, the same problem. Now, instead of carrying a palm pilot or small notepad the way some people cope with their organizational shortcomings, he carries a gargantu-

an leather-bound organizer, a truly massive sandwich of a binder. He carries it with him and feeds it anything he thinks important. Names, dates, telephone numbers, parking tickets.

He compiles these things, bunches them together because that way, he reasons, he will always know everything he needs to do; everything he needs to know is all conveniently in one place. Unless, of course, he loses the obese leather savior he has created for himself.

Then, a great cry goes up, and all the other important tiny pieces of paper, all the notes and bills and lists my mother has pooled and created and set around the house are cast aside, thrown onto the floor, and into great piles of magazines and old Christmas cards as he madly churns the cluttered bottom of the house, only to leave frustrated, unlock his car, and discover the very same organizer waiting obediently on the passenger seat. It is then that my father drives away, fleeing just as my mother, his wife, blissfully finishes an exceptionally long shower she started before he began this churning process. This leads to another great cry. These are the nights when my father brings home Chinese food.

For two months after my eighteenth birthday, I couldn't find my draft card and, while I didn't dodge an actual draft in the war torn summer of 2001, I did dodge the subjects of government, registration, armed forces of any kind, any profession where you wear a uniform, and the entire chain of Salvation Army clothing stores all summer long.

In the end, my Mother did what she's learned to do with my father and myself: she simply got another draft card, filled it out for me, and popped it in the mail.

My point is this: I live in an electronic world. I am generation next, and I shouldn't have to bother

with silly things like draft cards, speeding tickets, or rebate certificates. Some of us, most of us really, aren't cut out for paper collection; nowhere in evolution did man's success hinge on flattened pieces of chewed up wood splattered with vegetable dye. At least not until recently. In the past few hundred years we

My point is this: I live in an electronic world. I am generation next, and I shouldn't have to bother with silly things like draft cards, speeding tickets, or rebate certificates."

have, as a culture, built papier-mâché prisons for ourselves with passports, birth certificates, titles, registrations, credit card statements, receipts in triplicate, greenbacks, diplomas, contracts, and prenuptial agreements. When was the last time you saw a stockbroker smile at a ticker tape parade? More likely, he stood sullen and downcast as his chains fell from the sky and fluttered onto his shoulder or the corner of his shoe.

Part of the problem with all this paper is that there's often little to indicate which pieces of it are truly important and which are dispensable. Returned homework assignments, newspapers, career services flyers, old lottery tickets, napkins — these are all things we can throw away. I even lost my room selection card. Twice. And each time, I showed up and was issued a brand new one.

Why I needed it in the first place is beyond me.

Then there are the important ones: passports, birth certificates, trillion dollar bills, and certificates of title. A few weeks ago I lost my certificate of title. For my car. In the mail. Apparently this little blue square of paper, that resembles a certificate of achievement I got in fifth grade for being "most improved" of my co-ed soccer team, is so important, so critical that getting a new one takes weeks. Sometimes months. Without this piece of paper, I, apparently, don't own the expensive piece of metal and plastic and rubber and glass I paid for. Ridiculous.

In the last decade, we've outgrown this silly dependence on paper. My sister registers for classes online, and my mother recently got an upper level degree from the University of Nebraska via email. We don't need all this paper. We're past all that now.

All these troubles that plague me and my brethren, my father included, are useless. While my father may have his paper disabilities under control now, in the 21st century, he still endured forty-odd years of lost credit card statements, unpaid parking fines, and late tax filings.

I grew up with computers. My generation was the last to which the "internet" was a new and exciting thing. I remember the Internet before pictures. It wasn't ready then, but it's ready now. It's time that we, the digital generation, freeze this dependence on paper in its oak, birch, and maple tracks. Then my father will catch up with the times: he'll get a massive leather-bound computer bulging and straining against its leather strap, bits of data hanging and fluttering from its edges.