

DIARY OF A MAD SURFER

I've faced many challenges in my life: the Pepsi Challenge (and the subsequent Maalox Moment), the ESPN Fantasy Games Challenge (I picked nude quoits), my lifelong struggle to part my hair on the right side (I failed).

But when the latest AOL CD-ROM arrived in my mailbox, I paused. Here was a disc offering 1175 free hours online! And all I had to do was use them in 50 days! (Lessee, 50 days equals 1200 hours. That leaves 30 minutes per day for sleeping, eating, shampooing. Now I know why the little man on the AOL disc is running.)

Was I man enough for the AOL Challenge? I installed the disc, entered my secret password (PLAQUE-BLADDER) and was on my way.

Hour 1: Try to dial in.

Hour 2: Try to dial in.

Hour 3: Try to dial in.

Hour 4: Finally connect. Get CompuServe. Oops--wrong number.

Hour 5: Log on to AOL. Explore new Ad-o-Torium, where you can have personalized ads ("GYOUA--suffering from hot flashes?") delivered to your microwave oven 24 hours a day.

Hour 36: Send romantic e-mail to her. Accidentally also send Florida virus, which makes her PC reboot and count its RAM chips over and over, then stop without explanation.

Hour 88: Getting sleepy. Log on to Interior Secretary Norton's forum (Keyword: Stripmine). Wide awake now. Boss asks why I haven't done anything for three days.

Hour 134: Check e-mail again. Still no reply from her. While away hours constructing free verse from spam subject lines:

Time is running out
FIND that Long Lost Love***
hey
Porn Kings Fear Spitzer
Attract Men or Women FAST!
hi
Stop wasting your time

Hour 156: What was I thinking? I hate AOL! I hate Windows! I hate this \$@# \$ article! What a stupid--

Hour 282: How do I measure up? AOL's got the answer! (Keyword: Test Yourself.) Run Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Screening Test over and over, then Fat Intake Calculator ("Enter your age in meters"; "Select gender: Male/Female/Editor".) Site's advice: Stop running these tests.

Hour 627: Jittery. Did Jolt/espresso boilermakers at hour 612. Need help. (Keyword: Richard Parsons.) "I'm not here to talk about corporate wars, but corporate cooperation in another area of concern that George Bush and I share-- America's response to national emergencies..." Ahhhh. Sweet sleep at last.

Hour 627 1/4: Send *her* saucy e-mail with references to NyQuil, mustard plasters, Theraflu. Maybe I'm getting sick.

Hour 814: Bored. E-mail Pat Boone MP3 to friends after cleverly renaming it as their favorite band's. Death threats result.

Hour 1002: *Still* no e-mail from *her*. Try Keyword: Wildly Expensive Things That Might Win Her Over. No such forum. Go to Keyword: Flowers instead.

Hour 1026: Trip over beard. Must remember to shave.

Hour 1114: Hallucinations. See Richard Parsons in a tutu. See Desmond Tutu in a case. See *myself* in a tutu.

Hour 1148: Set AOL's parental controls to block e-mail from "Gore in '04" campaign.

Hour 1174: *Still* no e-mail from *her*, although a pallet of NyQuil arrived today. Is she trying to tell me something?

Hour 1175: Run Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Screening Test again. Site's advice: Stop writing article.