

've written this first-of-the-year column several times, at least in my mind. Each time the column has a new perspective and a different area of focus. For me, it's not difficult to come up with ideas for a column. My fragmented dreams and lonely musings could fill volumes. Ideas are as close as a nearby street sign or as far-away as a shooting star on a midnight clear. What these varied ideas have in common is a desire to communicate, to be understood, and to share human experiences with thousands of readers all over the world.

The World Wide Web has turned much of the world into a single electronic community similar to the way sea, air, and surface transportation has transformed Los Angeles into a microcosm of the Western Hemisphere. Here, in this desert metropolis, only a few scant miles separate vastly different cultures. On the Web, only small language barriers and nano seconds separate me from millions of my world wide neighbors.

The World Wide Web is a surreal environment and Internet communication is immediate and convenient. Living in Los Angeles, I also have many different customs, cultures and languages just outside my front door. I enjoy electronically visiting the world. I also appreciate the rich traditions, foods and customs I can physically explore in one of world's largest and more ethnically diverse cities. But sometimes all this connectivity and closeness makes me want to close my doors, seal my windows, flop on the couch, and dream of living in Avonlea at the turn-of-the-century.

As a dreamer and a writer, I fantasize about open expanses of land, rolling hills, covered horse bridges, and the romance of steam engines winding their way through mountain passes. As a citizen of what will soon be the 21st century, I'm adapting to a world that is ever seeking to pierce the remaining human vanities of privacy and a moment's pause for composure. We live in a world where each moment of the day is filled with either work or entertainment. In short, we're compelled to be either coming or going, but rarely allowed to stand in the crossroads, take a deep breath, and patiently choose our direction.

My life requires me to play many different roles. It's the melding of these roles that has become a challenge. Thankfully, my children are more adept than I at moving between their different worlds. They move quickly between video games, edutainment computer games, picture books, board games, and their Dad's extemporaneous bedtime stories. My children and I do share a favorite time: after lights out, in the quiet of the night, we dream of far-off places and visit a mystical land of hope. But, my life is more segmented than theirs. I have to consciously set aside time to have fun. I admire the easy way they change their mind set, their passions, and the focus of their play. It will serve them well in today's world.

Traveling the highways and byways of Los Angeles County can also be a mix of experiences. To travel 30 miles in the weekday morning rush, you might pack breakfast and an audio novel. You will most likely finish both before reaching your destination. You might even arrive just in time for lunch. On the weekends, I can travel at least that distance in less time than it takes in many restaurants to sit down and order lunch.

The Internet (or Information Superhighway) and its graphical counterpart, the World Wide Web, are no strangers to traffic jams and slow downs, especially during information rush hours such as when business men and women typically arrive at their offices or about an hour before they leave. Here, the surreal world of the Web meets the reality of limited infrastructure.

Ironically, our two worlds — the tangible, physical world around us and the electronic world we explore — are brought together not by creative commonality but by an indifference to proper industrial planning. Web access will have to catch up to demand in much the same way millions of people waited for full service cable TV or expanded highway capacity. More ironically, those of us living in major US cities have no shortage of Internet options. We might spend hours sitting in traffic, but getting our e-mail is hardly ever a problem. This amusing contrast only illustrates the increasing intensity of our already busy lives.

This year's Christmas shopping highlighted the many and varied worlds in which we live. Sony and Nintendo battled for electronic supremacy in the video game world. Ironically, with all the concern about video game violence, the most ravaged portion of my local toy store was the "Barbie" aisle. In Southern California, parents (and perhaps their children) seemed to be yearning for more traditional toys. Stores were loaded with old-fashioned wooden wagons and other nostalgic items. Many purchasers didn't own these toys as children, but wish they had. Maybe it was a way for many of us to meld what we think should have been with the way we would like things to be.

Most ironic about the different worlds in which we live is the way we choose how to travel in them. No one I know brags they bought the same car as most everyone else. However, people seem to prefer to buy the same computer and operating system as their neighbor or co-worker.

Our cars get most of us to and from work. In LA my car might take me to Chinatown, too. Or, to that little restaurant that prepares the best Mexican food this side of the border. They don't take checks or credit cards and not everyone speaks the same language. That's OK. The food speaks for itself. But, to see the rest of the world, I use my computer. It's logged more miles than my car ever will. My largest client uses Windows. I much prefer the elegance of my Mac. People like comfort and performance in their cars. It's a wonder they don't choose the same for their computers. When I electronically travel the world, I want the best seat possible.

In a couple of days my kids will be back in my care. My daughter will be doing her homework, my son will be playing Nintendo, and I'll be making dinner. After dinner, they'll work with their educational CD-ROMs. After bath, we'll read the next chapters of some excellent books. At bedtime, it's Dad's extemporaneous stories about the mystical land of elves, dwarfs, unicorns and special children who are strikingly similar to my own. Our time together is spent sharing, learning, talking and laughing. It's the human experience called, "Family."

My kids use a Mac. So do I. After they fall asleep I'll explore the world. I might make a stop in Avonlea or visit a friend's Web site located on the other side of our planet. I don't know. I do know I want the best equipment to get me there. As a writer, I want the best equipment, too.

I'm glad I have a Mac. It makes melding my worlds a little easier. The G3s are in stock. Check them out!

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