

Only in America

by Jack Swenson

I had a doctor's appointment the day the passenger jet lost its tail and made an unscheduled stop in Queens. Sick to my stomach, I searched the online news websites for details, but nobody had much information.

I went outside and smoked a cigarette. To the west, behind the house, clouds the colors of ashes were bunched like fists. Later it began to rain. The water pounded on the roof, sending the cats flying for the bedroom, where they huddled cheek to jowl beneath the bed.

My appointment was a routine matter. I go in every six months to have my blood checked. After the checkup, I went to lunch with my wife, who works in the clinic. Later one of the doctors joined us. The conversation was office gossip and chitchat. The medical folks, knowing what was what about calories and cholesterol, ate lightly. I wolfed down a ham and cheese sandwich and a piece of pumpkin pie.

Weekdays I go for a walk in the morning with a friend. That day my friend was bitter because the Baptists were up in arms about the Harry Potter movie. My friend said that our religious nuts were as bad as the Muslims.

Wednesday morning I read a story on the CNN Website about the rebels taking over a radio station in the Afghanistan capital and hiring women to read the news.

I checked my e-mail, and there was a message from my cousin in Minneapolis. It was a joke about a veterinarian, a cat, and a Labrador retriever. I wrote back and told him that I wasn't going to fly on airplanes anymore.

My cousin replied that travel by air was safer than driving.

My wife and I get up early in the morning, my wife because she has to go to work. I get up early because that's when I wake up. Thursday I was up at five o'clock. I fed the cats, and then I went into our home office and booted up the computer. There was a story

in the news about a plan in the works to destroy the United States. Mullah Omar was quoted as saying that "America will fall to the ground." The extinction of America will come about if God is willing.

For some reason the story cheered me. I told my wife that I would be very surprised if God were on the side of the Taliban.

Thursday is garbage day in our neighborhood. The sun was still below the foothills to the east of our house when I went outside to get the newspaper. An Asian woman carrying two bulging plastic sacks was raiding the recycling bins, picking out the aluminum soda cans. As I watched, she went from bin to bin up and down the street. Then she got into her car and drove away. As she left, I noticed the logo on the rear of the car. It was a Mercedes.

"Holy Moses," I said to myself. "Is this a great country, or what?"

