

Confessions of a Closet Hoarder

by John Olson

I'm a closet hoarder. That doesn't mean I hoard things in the closet (though in fact I do), I mean it more in the metaphorical sense as a peccadillo invisible to the random gaze of John Q. Public. I refer, specifically, to the hoarding that goes on in my wallet. It is a large wallet of finished leather which I purchased some years ago at a public market. The generosity of its size is compounded by the intricacy of its compartments. Even in its infancy, when it held but a few plastic cards, I had trouble wrestling it out of my back pocket. Lately, it has become unusually fat and unwieldy. I save everything: receipts from the ATM, grocery receipts, new shoes and shoe repair receipts, doctor appointments, dental appointments, movie ticket stubs, business cards, poetry manifestos, deflated balloons, disarmament treaties, cooking recipes, flower petals, American primitive paintings and a Triple A card even though we no longer own a car. In order to function in the public and produce the right card at the right time, I have to shift and rearrange the vast assortments of card and identity housed within its chambers. It is a labor conducting transactions with this behemoth of a billfold. Why, one is bound to ask. Why do I not purge its contents of detritus? In a word: fear. The fear of missing a receipt to prove to the bank that a quantity of missing money is their fault, not mine. This has never happened, but there is always a first time. There is the fear of accident, the fear of arrest, the fear of liability. The fear of pandemonium in general. Loss of identity, loss of direction, loss of esteem when it is discovered I do not have the proper tickets, the proper sanction, the proper license, the proper documentation. Many years ago I visited a nude beach. I undressed at the car and walked with my companions onto a California beach as naked as the day we were born. It felt odd, of course. The sensations of wind and

heat and sand and exposure were all novel and awkward and strange. But by far, the strangest sensation, the one that proved most difficult to assimilate, was the lack of a wallet. There was nothing about my person to declare officially and indubitably who I was. Nothing happened. We enjoyed our day, returned to the car, dressed, and returned to normal society. But the feeling persists. The feeling of security I feel when I wrestle this leather prodigy out of my back pocket and slide a credit card or library card or organ donation card from its bowels, and endorse my needs with a stratum of permits, privileges, and approval. For as long as I can remember, I have never been without it. It is an appendage as pertinent to my welfare as a kidney. It is a comforting lump pressed against my buttcheek, and in it is the story of my life.

