

My first job was in an office. I hated it. No, that's not true. Actually, I liked the job. It was the people I hated. Thus from the start, I was destined for a long line of jobs in 'the people professions'.

Perhaps most notable of these was my job at 602, a residential program run by the Mental Health Association. Selected patients from the local psych hospital (those with potential!) were transferred, at some point in time, to 602 – so called because its address was 602 Bonkers Street – where the staff would teach the residents life skills, help them find a job and an apartment, and generally provide support during their transition from institutionalized living to independent living. (I highly recommend the program to those who work in an office.) I was hired as a relief worker and mostly covered the midnight shift. Which meant that I helped the residents make the transition from sleeping in a bed to sleeping in a bed.

Which was okay because I would've had trouble teaching life skills. How to buy groceries, how to keep track of your chequing account – these were adults we were dealing with, and I had neither the desire nor the need to infantilize them. After all, people who need people are, well, codependent.

Besides, you want life skills? Okay, how about how to deal with the recognition that you're never really going to amount to much. And how to be content nevertheless. And, yes, how to make foil headgear that is durable yet fashionable.

On my first midnight shift, I took Kessie with me, partly thinking of all those sweet and cuddly animal therapy programs, and partly thinking that if I dozed off, she'd be my alarm system, sure to wake up growling the second any crazy with a knife walked into the room. Turned out, she refused to go sleep. I stretched out on the couch and she sat on my head. All night. At full alert. Apparently ready to scream. The place scared her.

No wonder. All of my coworkers had previous experience with mental illness. First-hand. In fact, I think that was a prerequisite for obtaining a full-time position. A relapse seemed to be the prerequisite for promotion.

Unfortunately, it turned out I was hired just in time for the annual staff retreat. I suspected it was an office party disaster waiting to happen. I didn't want to go. But I also didn't want to be reprimanded, yet again, for not being a team player. Damned if I do, damned if I don't.

So Friday evening, six of us piled into Kathy's minivan. We were obviously going to get a headstart on the group bonding thing. I asked if that was fair. They smiled indulgently and said, "Oh you just want to drive down on that new Harley of yours instead of being with us." Well yeah. Duh.

We arrived at the retreat site, which was well off the highway, and for a second I was glad I came – it was beautiful. Forest as far as the eye could see, in orange and gold and scarlet, a sparkling dark blue lake, a couple canoes on the shore, gentle babbling from a stream that fed the lake... We spent the entire next two days inside. Replenishing our inner spirits.

Saturday began with a pre-breakfast yoga session, a breakfast get-to-know-you, two morning sessions, and a lunch mixer. So I was told. I don't get up until noon. (Well, unless I work the midnight shift. Then I don't go to bed until noon. Which means that on any given day, or, well, on any given night I guess – oh never mind.)

At around 1:00 p.m., I found myself being hustled to the first of three afternoon sessions by one of my coworkers, Clara. Who was way too chirpy. Obviously a morning person. I grabbed a carafe of tea and a cup from the lunch table as we passed it, and stuffed some creamers and a plastic-wrapped egg salad sandwich into my pocket. She led me into a roomful of people, and to the corner occupied by the 602 staff.

"Hello again," the session leader at the front of the room said, and beamed. "Wasn't that a fantastic lunch?" she asked, and everyone applauded. Applause? For egg salad? Plastic-wrapped egg salad? I looked around. A lot of people looked suspiciously

beatific. Did I miss something spectacular? Were the leaders that charismatic? No wait, I've seen that look – they're fucking all on Prozac! I missed the free samples!

"What we're going to do first this afternoon," she continued as if she were about to present a won-der-ful gift, "is something called 'What Colour are You?'" You've got to be kidding. I had finished my first cup of tea and had poured a second, but was still way too tired to run through my Meyers-Briggs critique, and anyway these people should know better, this is all so old, and lame, " – but with a little twist." Her eyes twinkled. Mine twitched. "I want you to think about what colour each of your coworkers is. Then we'll have you pow-wow in your work groups to share your perceptions. Be open. Be honest. Remember, those are the building blocks of a good team..." Yeah right. Like I'm gonna fall for that again. (When did you stop hitting your wife?) Director Jean, you're airhead blue. Kathy, you're – oh my god. They're all airhead blue.

"I'm going to pass on this one," I said, "I really haven't had time to get to know any of you," I tried to smile. "And I really have to pee," I pointed to the carafe.

When I returned to the room, I discovered that things could indeed get worse. Each session ended with a group hug. I looked around. Surely they don't have enough Academy Awards on hand to cover this performance.

The next session was a 'revitalizer'. Up on our feet, stretch up, that's it, one arm, skyreach, the other arm, skyreach, now climb that ladder into the clouds – I can't believe I'm doing this. I imagined myself presenting these warm-ups to my old track buddies, started to laugh, caught Clara's glance, then imagined myself packing it in right then and there and going for a long run through the forest. That's it, now exhale, and blow those clouds away! Good! Now stand on one leg and lift the other, from the hip, that's it, how do you feel?

"Like a dog taking a piss." Oops. Jean gave me a look of disappointment. As did Kathy, Clara, and Lynn.

And then it was time for another group hug.

One of the midnight duties was to get the morning meds ready. This meant making sure the right number of pinks and whites and blues and yellows were in the proper dispensers labelled for whoever got said pinks and whites and blues and yellows. Once I played musical chairs with everyone's meds for a week. Oddly enough, there was no noticeable difference in anyone's behaviour.

So, seeking an alternative to pharmaceutical therapy, and just plain curious, I wondered what would happen if I acted crazier than the residents. One day I served everyone a slice of cake batter. Another day I posted signs written in my own private language, Wittgenese.

Regular staff didn't agree, but I say that did result in an improvement – if only because of a general increase in self-esteem: I mean, compared to me, they figured they were doing pretty good. They weren't stupid, after all; they were just sick.

Or they were Mary Margaret. She heard a voice in her head. It was God. So the staff thought she was crazy. I thought they were jealous. Or just as crazy. And I told them so at the next staff meeting.

"You all believe in God?" I asked, by way of explanation.

Of course. Nods and murmurs of assent all round.

"And you pray?"

Yes, indeed they did.

"But none of you hears voices, none of you hears God."

No, we do not, of course not.

"So you spend your time – some of you, your life – talking to a god that doesn't ever talk back. And," I continued, "you don't really expect him to."

Mary Margaret lay down naked in the middle of the road one day because God asked her to. She assumed she had been chosen as a sacrifice because at forty, she was still a virgin.

"Why didn't you just go have sex instead?" I asked her, when we were sitting in the tv room one night.

She gave me the oddest look and walked away. Silently. Solemnly.

The next time I was in, I was told she'd been out to the bars every night soliciting men. Apparently she'd had sex with over two dozen in the last week alone. Staff was concerned with this further decline into depravity.

"You know, you only have to do it once to not be a virgin anymore," I told her when, again, we were sitting in the tv room. "I don't think God will choose you to be a sacrifice anymore. Or you can do it with yourself," I added. "That counts."

She looked surprised, confused, relieved, and pleased – though not necessarily in that order.

The following weekend, I was informed that not only had she stopped going out, but she had started going to bed rather early. The staff was relieved – and surprised, pleased, and confused.

"So," I plopped myself down on the couch in the tv room. She was sitting in the chair, her chair, across from me. "Heard from God lately?"

"No," she said with some anxiety, "and I'm a bit worried about what He'll ask me to do next."

"Hm." I thought for a moment. "I have a confession to make." She raised her eyebrows. "God talks to me too. But I don't think it's the same god."

Her eyes widened. She didn't say anything. Clearly she was torn between the possibility that God might speak to someone else and the possibility that there might be another God.

"Every Tuesday at 11:00," I said. "I think that's my appointment time."

Her eyes widened further. "What does he say?" she eventually asked, genuinely interested.

"Oh, lots of stuff," I said casually. "Be kind.' Be happy.' 'Always wear blue."

Again her eyebrows raised. I pointed to my jeans.

"One time he told me to put my paycheques straight into the bank and only take out so much in cash so I'd always have enough for rent and food. That way I'd always have a safe place of my own, a home. That was real good advice."

Mary Margaret was thinking hard. Very hard.

"But I don't think it's the same god that talks to you," I continued.

"Oh." She seemed sad. "Why?"

"Well he says his name is 'Godd' – he really emphasizes the 'd' at the end, so I think he spells his name G-o-d-d. How does your god spell his name?"

"He's never said." And until now that wasn't a problem.

I nodded. Wisely.

"Why don't you switch?" I asked.

"What?" Wow. Another possibility to ponder.

"Why don't you switch gods?"

"I didn't know you could do that."

"Oh sure. It's like those long-distance carriers, you know, for phone calls. You just have to call and say you'd like to switch."

So we went into the office and I helped her find the number for Primus, or maybe it was Sprint. And she called right then and there. It was 2:00 in the morning. And the customer rep at the other end, bless her, not only let her switch from God with one 'd' to Godd with two 'ds', but also gave her an appointment time of Fridays at 10:00 p.m.

I saw Mary Margaret at the mall a couple months later. She had moved out of the house and into her own apartment. And she had on the cutest baby blue polyester pantsuit I'd seen since the '70s.

Lily is 602's compulsive shopper. Luann is one of O & D's shoplifters. The three of us (I'm relief staff at both the psych halfway house and the juvenile detention center) headed out to a mall one day, the two of them delighted at discovering in common an enthusiasm for shopping. They made a bee-line for one of those sprawling economy department stores that have everything you could possibly imagine but nothing you could actually want. Let alone need. I trailed behind, at a discreet distance that was supposed to make them feel independent, one of the many purposes of such a field trip.

Lily grabbed a shopping cart and began to fill it at once – with socks, tshirts, scarves, hats, jeans, sweaters, umbrellas – all the while maintaining a chatter that was part auctioneer and part shopping channel spokesperson. Luann followed, recognizing Lily as the perfect decoy, and stealthily secreted various items into various pockets.

By the time they left Ladies' Wear, Lily was onto her second shopping cart. By the time they'd gotten through Kitchenwares, she'd enlisted Luann to push a third. She was in Shoppers' Heaven. She'd never filled three shopping carts before.

Luann was feeling aggrieved – it was clear she was outdone. She'd never be able to lift more than Lily was accumulating. So she scored the next item when Lily was watching, and winked at her. Lily was confused for a moment, looking much like a puppy seeing for the first time an older dog calmly walk away with the just delivered pizza box. While stealing clearly had advantages over buying, she realized, as Luann had, that she couldn't possibly take nearly as much that way. So she decided to stick with compulsive shopping. And that made Luann doubly aggrieved. So when Lily put shoehorns into that third cart – six of them, one of each colour – Luann blew.

"YOU DON'T FUCKING NEED ALL THIS SHIT!!!" she yelled. So loudly she lost half her loot. Among the many items that fell clattering to the floor was a travel mini-shoeshine kit. Lily stared at this shoeshine kit. Luann stared at the shoeshine kit. Lily looked at her shoehorns. Luann looked at the shoehorns. I call it 'the shoe moment'.

Then, wordlessly, they both left the scene. Unfortunately for me, through different exits. I eventually found them both, wandering in the parking lot, looking for my car. (I was doing the same thing.) We left the mall and neither one of them went 'shopping' again.

At the end of a week during which I happened to be lucky enough to be staff escort for a trip to the grocery store with the 602s (the mentally healthy wannabes at the psych halfway house) and for a trip to an outdoor festival with the O & Ds (the juvenile delinquents at the detention center), I had a great idea: why not pair a 602 with an O & D? I imagined a program that was a cross between those that paired juvenile delinquents with dogs and those that paired ex-cons with people in wheelchairs. You know the ones I'm talking about. (My dog thought it was a great idea. But then she somehow got the idea that she'd get to go for a car ride in a wheelchair.) So I stayed up late, or early, and presented the idea to each place during the weekly staff meeting.

Surprisingly enough, it was accepted. Any idea proposed by a mere relief worker is usually rejected out-of-hand; actually, that's not quite true – rejection presupposes some degree of consideration. So I figure it was probably that time of the budget year when program directors were told to either 'use it or lose it' – and I suspect that neither the 602 program director nor the O & D program director had proposed anything new in a long while, so they were quite happy to grab the ball and run with it. My ball. Of course I didn't get any credit for it. Not that it would've done me any good – relief workers are simply not on any career ladder, and neither initiative, good work, long service, nor ass-kissing results in advancement.

But that's just as well because the program – 'Northerly Hills 602OD' – was pretty much a disaster. Rott (short for Rottweiler), a big kid with hair that was a cross between a Mohawk and an Afro, was a repeat offender for assorted assaults. Actually, one of these was against a coworker who, in a moment of canine confusion, called him Poo (short for Poodle). That was the first time. The second time happened when I dared said coworker to tie a pink ribbon in Rott's hair when he was asleep one night (we had to do bedchecks every half hour). Anyway, Rott was paired with Len, the most meek and mild of the 602s (who didn't have so much a personality disorder as an absent

personality). The idea was that antagonism would be statistically impossible and hence another assault equally unlikely. Rott beat the crap out of Len at their first meeting. So he was then paired with George, who was not only physically intimidating, at 6'4" and 240 lbs, but also suffering from delusions of questionable grandeur – he thought he was Hulk Hogan. Rott beat the crap out of George too. (The upside is that George no longer believes he's Hulk Hogan.)

Two other pairings are worth mention, both having been reasonably successful. Lily is 602's compulsive shopper. Luann is one of O & D's shoplifters. The three of us headed out to a mall one day, the two of them delighted at discovering in common an enthusiasm for shopping. They made a bee-line for one of those sprawling economy department stores that have everything you could possibly imagine but nothing you could actually want. Let alone need. I trailed behind, at a discreet distance that was supposed to make them feel independent, one of such a trip's many purposes.

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The other interesting pairing involved Shane, whose conversation was pretty much limited to "Fuck this!" and James, who had no conversation – he hadn't spoken in five years. We figured that Shane, having to carry both ends of the conversation, would be compelled to become a little more articulate. And that's exactly what happened. When he was with James, he was overheard to mutter things like "Wanna coffee?" and "Gotta piss." Given another ten years, I thought, he might actually engage in the mindless pleasantries that indicate social maturity. (Go figure, but that's how people measure social maturity.)

But the really interesting change occurred in James. One day, sitting alone in his room, he was heard to have quietly said "Fuck this." Now, not only had he uttered words, but there had been a reasonable facsimile of emotional expression in the utterance as well. Whatever, saying those two little words quietly, alone in his room, seemed sufficient to simply dismiss whatever it was he had been obsessed to silence with for all those years.

A little while later, while watching tv with the others, somewhat less catatonically than before, he again said, "Fuck this" and left the room. It was the first display of autonomy the staff had ever seen.

Of course, only one more step remained, which he took a month later. He said, once more, "Fuck this" – and walked out of 602, never to be seen again.

I suspect she was just pissed about the dinner party. They had a lot of day-long dinner party things, for which we spent much of the previous day preparing. I 'took care of' the vegetables. Interesting how flexible the definitional limits of that phrase are. On the first of such preparation days, I washed the piles she had put on the counter: potatoes, carrots, celery, tomatoes, other red things, white things, and a bunch of green stuff I didn't recognize. Then I thought I was through. The look she gave me indicated otherwise.

"You may as well peel them now," she said, tactfully, as if I had planned to peel them later. Right. As if.

So, remembering my mother's manufactured obsession with white, I peeled the brown skins off the potatoes. There went the vitamins. Next – I glanced over, the She-Bitch-Wife was still supervising me from the other end of the large kitchen – were the carrots. Beets too had to be peeled. Who knew? I'd spent the previous year living on potatoes (unpeeled) (and raw), apples (ditto) (ditto), canned beans, and Shreddies. (I could say that that was due to the lack of a fridge and a hotplate. But I'd be lying.) When I started on the celery, I got another look. The tomatoes too were spared. Okay, now I'm done. I rinsed my hands and dried them on a towel.

"Slice and dice!" she said sweetly – though really I'm just guessing about that – as I moved toward the door.

Why would you slice and dice, for example, carrots? They're much harder to eat that way. A fork is required. Mindful of the hours of practice I still needed if I was to pass my exam, I handled this slice and dice task with the greatest of concentration.

Then she showed me how to make 'radish roses'. At first I thought anyone who carves radishes into roses has way too much time on their hands. But then I got into what I started to call 'raw sculpture'. I discovered a thing that makes melon balls. And I discovered a melon. I started putting poppy seed happy faces on my little melon balls.

Then sad faces, and stern faces, and winks. Recalling the balloon toys of someone's childhood, I joined orange and green melon balls with toothpicks and made a centipede. A happy centipede. Hours passed. Then I remembered Mr. Potato Head. She stopped me when I started dressing my melon creations with Jenny's doll clothes.

In the meantime, she took care of marinating the meat. Beef, I think. Though it could have been cow. She put it into a pan, poured some stuff over it, and then watched it. An hour after I'd left the kitchen, she was still there, sherry in hand, watching the meat soak. (Perhaps it was a metaphor.)

Anyway, at the dinner party in question – I noticed a dish of cucumber cubes beside the dish of radish roses – she had obviously discovered what I'd done with the cucumber, complete with a cute little sailor hat, and had sliced and diced it. (No doubt that was a metaphor too).

Todd, a quiet boy, didn't have enough friends for a game of checkers, let alone a birthday party, so from the start the party had the effect of accentuating his social inadequacies. But his mom insisted that her little boy would have a birthday party. He was turning six. So she invited all these other boys – she'd probably put up an ad at the Seven-Eleven – who were aged anywhere from, well, seven to eleven, it turned out. Todd didn't know most of them. And he didn't like any of them. And he was afraid of some of them.

Now, I don't know anything about doing a kid's birthday party. They didn't ask about that at the interview. They asked if I had a drivers' licence, they asked about my hobbies, and they were very impressed with the fact that I was university-educated. But I hadn't taken Birthday Parties 101. I hadn't even taken Child Psych. (I had taken Criminal Psych. So if Todd, or Jenny, had had a criminal record, that I would've been able to handle...) (And I'd taken Abnormal Psych. Which, actually, turned out to be – oh never mind.)

I did, however, bake him a birthday cake. Sort of. Turned out I invented a pudding-in-the-middle cake. If I had patented it then (years before Betty Crocker or Duncan Hines did), I could've been a rich sonuvabitch by now. (Where was Steve when I needed him?)

Anyway, the boys wanted to play cops and robbers or cowboys and indians or missionaries and natives, but whenever I hear gunshot sounds, I imagine people dying. Go figure. So I said no and suggested they listen to a piano concert instead. My Bach needed work.

Well, no one but Todd wanted to do that. So I kept the birthday boy happy, oddly enough, by playing each bar of Bach's second Prelude over and over...

The other boys went swimming and, apparently, two of them drowned. As I later explained to Todd, that was an excellent example of natural selection. If people who

can't swim are stupid enough to jump off a dock, well, what happened was a good thing. Especially since, as young boys, they hadn't yet replicated their stupidity.

Todd mutely nodded his agreement, having been tossed into the lake at three years of age by his He-Man-Dad, a strong advocate of the 'Sink or Swim' school of thought. (Todd had promptly discovered a third option, 'Flail about in Terror', thus demonstrating the false dichotomy error of reasoning. And so, though he hasn't spoken above a whisper since, he will have an advantage over his classmates in Critical Thinking 101.)

One day, while I was watching Jenny's kinderdance class from the back of the studio, perched on a small chair with the rest of the mothers or mother-substitutes, the teacher had to suddenly leave.

"Would you take over for a moment, please?" she said to me, rushing out. Serves me right for sitting closest to the door.

Okay. Sure. How hard can this be? I stood in front of the class.

"All right, let's try a simple step-together-step-touch," I said, demonstrating, moving to the right, and then to the left. And forgetting for the moment that they had probably just learned how to walk. Forward. I was now expecting them to dance.

Sideways.

A glance in the mirror tipped me off. One went down. Then another. And a third. Ohhh, that had to hurt. The fourth watched speculatively, chubby legs planted firmly, thumb in her mouth. It refused to try the step. It was destined for great things in life.

Okay, I thought, I'm no Bob Fosse, I'm not obsessed with that particular step, my choreography can do without it.

"Good," I said after the three casualties had regained an erect posture, "Very good." (I knew the importance of positive feedback – it was in Power Training! after all.)

"How about just a step-touch, step-touch, step-touch," I exaggerated the step, moving from side to side.

Interestingly, all of them got it almost immediately. Well, the step part anyway. They weren't having anything to do with the touch part. They all just started rocking stiff-legged from side to side. A few glanced with furtive pride to the back – Look Ma, I'm a dancin' fool!

'Course, none of them were in time with the music. Well then, let's work on our rhythm. I put on what would become one of my dog's favourites. "Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road."

"Let's all clap in time to the music," I said with enthusiasm, clapping in time to the music. They tried. It sounded like an erratic echo chamber. One loud clap – mine – on beat one, and a bunch of tiny echo claps scattered haphazardly among the microbeats of the rest of the bar. Quite a neat effect, actually.

I then noticed that a few had hands that kept missing each other. Coordination! Of course! I'm sure that's also in the lesson plan! So when they had tired of clapping, fourteen seconds into the song, I said, "Okay, everyone, let's try something else. Put your arms out straight. Now close your eyes and touch your nose with the second finger of your right hand."

Dunks, the whole lot of them. Especially the few who fell down as soon as they had closed their eyes.

Most people are surprised to hear that deejays are professionally trained. Indeed we are. Not all of us, of course. There are many imposters out there with their rec room stereos and their K-Tel collections. But in order to become a licensed deejay, you have to go through intensive training for two whole weekends.

Three of the four days are spent discussing equipment, troubleshooting, emergency repair, and maintenance. On the third day, we were tested. We were put in groups of four, and each group was assigned a set of equipment that had been sabotaged in some way. One group electrocuted itself. They failed. Another group had a loose connection. Couldn't figure it out. A third group had been supplied with a mono jack instead of a stereo one. So no, it wasn't the speaker. Our group had to build an amplifier with just a piece of string, some bubblegum, a toaster oven, and an instruction manual translated from Japanese. I alone succeeded. Bob, Sam, and Marty refused to read the manual.

During lunch, we had fun with the strobe light and the disco ball. Well, except for Arthur. He had an epileptic seizure. (Good to know. For the Epileptic Association's Dinner and Dance.)

Then we discovered the karaoke machine. I love music, and I love to dance, but I cannot sing. So when it was my turn, recalling Limp Bizkit's version of "My Way," I screamed out the words with frenzied urgency: "I left my heart in San Francisco!" The first line alone cracked me up and I could go no further.

The last day focussed on music – styles, tempos, and how to put together a set – and stereotyping – how to make generalizations about what kind of music people like based on their age, sex, clothing, and food preferences.

"So you mean my seventy-year-old grandmother can't possibly like Offspring's 'Why Don't You Get a Job?'" I asked.

Our trainer, Mr. Music Please, said, "No, she'll like Tommy Dorsey. For her, you would play 'I'll Be Seeing You'."

"Would not."

I borrowed the guy-next-to-me's cell phone.

"Hey Grandma! It's me! Do you like Tommy Dorsey? 'I'll Be Seeing You'?"

"Yeah, there's this guy here saying that seventy-year-old grandmothers like Tommy Dorsey. That's right. 'I'll Be Seeing You.'

"Yeah. I know. All right. I will. Yeah.

"Right now? Okay."

I turned, grinning, from the phone to Mr. Music Please. "She says to tell the asshole she'd rather hear AC/DC.

"Yeah. Love you too Grandma. Bye." I handed the phone back to the guy-next-to-me. "Thanks."

A week later, just in time for income tax season, I was qualified to do personal income tax returns. But despite passing the course with flying colours, I almost didn't get hired. I failed the application form.

Name. I like it that this question comes first. It's one I can answer.

Address. I also know where I live.

Phone Number. Three for three!

Sex. Other.

Marital Status. No. (Unmarried women have no status.)

Name Known to References if Different from Name Indicated Above. Hm.

Bitch. (At this point, I began to feel my application form advantage slipping away.)

Education. Yes.

Scholastic Awards. Regional Math Quizmaster, Trout Township, 1972.

Employment History. Yes. Attach additional page if necessary. No. (I'm not doing that anymore. I used to make out a complete list of all my previous jobs and attach it, as directed. I thought I was displaying versatility and a wealth of experience. A friend – okay, an acquaintance – pointed out that I was displaying stupidity. With a list like mine, she said, I'd be considered a flight risk, a bad investment. Employers wanted someone who could hold down a job for more than – she scanned my neatly typed list – a week.)

What aspect of your previous employment did you enjoy the most? Recess.

What aspect of your previous employment did you find the most challenging?

Dealing with an asshole supervisor.

Describe any skills or experience relevant to to the position being applied for.

Attention to to detail.

Hobbies. Snow shovelling, apparently. (It had been a very long winter.)

Have you ever lied? Yes. This answer is a lie.

Have you ever stolen anything from your previous employers? Yes. But only when my name was Heinz and my mother would've died otherwise.

Position Applied For. Income Tax Filler-Outer.

Other Kinds of Work You Might Be Interested In. Ship's Philosopher on the Starship Enterprise.

And then I almost failed the arithmetic test because I felt like Q taking the Stanford-Binet, and I kept muttering insults to Riker.

When I went for my final interview, I had a sneaking suspicion that the Manager had read my application form, decided not to hire me, and then prepared the perfect list of interview questions to justify his decision. Not exactly standard procedure, but then he probably had the word 'discretion' in his job description. And he intended to use it, damn it. After all, he'd certainly been to enough management training seminars!

He couldn't wait to start the interview, and was practically grinning as he asked his first question.

"Well, yes," I answered, "actually I do have experience working with the criminally insane."
