

Archiving M.E.M.O.

By [Tyler Day](#)

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One of my tasks as the *Century's* online-editorial intern is to [archive past issues on the website](#). It can be tedious, but it's also quite fascinating to see various subjects develop in the magazine's pages over time. At this point I've worked back as far as Christmas 1998, meaning the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal is front and center. I was 11 when that happened; I know the present-day Clinton everyone loves much better than the 1998 Clinton no one knew what to do with.

But by far the highlight is reading Martin Marty's old [columns](#). Whenever I get to a new issue I skip to the back page, knowing I'll get a nice chuckle. Below are some of my recently archived favorites. Call it an attempt to persuade you to [subscribe to the Century](#)—giving you access to the online archives—or call it a nice diversion after a couple tough weeks in the world.

In [this column](#), on a controversy over journalist James Warren accepting an upgrade to fly first class, Marty "searched [his] own soul":

Harriet and I were about 15 people back in the "economy" line waiting to be processed for a trip to London. The airline representative signaled us to come forward and whispered that we could get an upgrade. . . Before we boarded I asked why Harriet and I were God's, or at least the airline's, elect. "You were the only neatly dressed couple—you in your bow tie and your wife wearing a dress—we thought you'd upgrade business class." Flight personnel, I am told, are turned off by mass grunge on travelers.

You can be sure that we now always go to the airport reasonably well dressed. . .

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Often I speak on campuses, at least wanly questioning hierarchy and privilege. Before the lecture, the school president or dean will say, "Time is short. We have to crash the cafeteria line, load up our trays, and head for the VIP room to eat before you talk." I have no choice but to share this grand privilege. Usually I hold the tray up to hide my face, to minimize resentment and enhance my credibility

when speaking.

Century readers used to send in church-bulletin misprints. [This column](#) includes a whole set of them; here are a few:

Two consecutive lines from a Spokane folder: "September Board of Trustees Meeting Cancelled. Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope." To whom else shall we turn when the trustees are off duty?

A Glens Falls, New York, church newsletter hopes that you will attend Pastor Riley's "popular series of programs. This year's subject will be the Dementions of Faith, Hope and Love." But the greatest of these is Madness. . . .

You'd think this announcement is from Lutherans at Lake Wobegon, where guilt goes public, and not their kin in Platteville, New York: "It was wonderful for the kids to see the guilts they had worked on hanging up for display."

Then there are the other kinds of Lutherans, including these from Luther Memorial Church in Chicago: "Flea Market/Bake Sale/Light Lunch/Donations Accepted," with this punch line: "No Clothes." An Edenic experience.

[This one](#)'s my favorite. Our resident fashion expert considers the baggy-jeans phenomenon, compares it to the church, and foretells a time when skinnier jeans would make their joyous return. Here's the hipster prophet:

The market disciples are quick to copy the MTV approach, do market research and change everything "but the gospel itself," they would say, as they change everything so much that the gospel gets wide-butted, too. . . .

Of course, the church can learn from Levi's intransigence. But the Levi's story gives the impression that very heavy work is going into analyzing a very fickle, always unstable market. There is balanced adaptation and there is frenetic compromise on the part of various groups trying to keep up with popular culture. Who wins?

Had I a time capsule I'd put in it a note that says: "In a few years 'the kids' will get tired of wide-butt jeans, the merely casual fashion, the obsession with informal culture, and we will see stories about 'The Return to Levi's.' Of course, they won't be made in the U.S.A., but then, neither is the gospel.