

ON A LIGHTER SIDE with Andy Rooney



I have what I think is bad news for people who own a home that has a lawn. James Hagedorn, the president of Scotts Miracle-Gro, just announced that his company has developed a new, slower-growing, genetically-engineered grass that hardly ever has to be mowed. I'm for progress in most areas, but grass is one thing that doesn't need to be improved. I don't want my lawn to be genetically-engineered. What makes Mr. Miracle-Gro himself think I'll be any happier if I only have to mow the lawn twice a year? If he's so smart, how come he leaves the "w" off "grow" in the name of his company? He thinks "Miracle-Gro" is clever?

The fact is, Mr. Hagedorn, people like to mow their lawns. It's like shoveling the snow off the sidewalk. There are just a few simple chores left that are easy and satisfying for the homeowner, and those are two of them. If someone has a sidewalk too big to shovel or a lawn too extensive to mow, they must be rich enough to pay someone to do it for them. Cutting the grass is not a job we hate. It's easy, satisfying and it makes the place look better. So leave our grass alone, Mr. Hagedorn. We like it the way it is. Nothing makes people feel prouder than mowing their lawn... unless it's shoveling their sidewalk.

There are people who enjoy ironing because they find ironing relaxing. For the few minutes it takes them to do it, they know exactly what they're doing. That's the way it is with a person shoveling a sidewalk or mowing a lawn.

If Mr. Hagedorn wants to help homeowners, he ought to give some attention to the jobs we really hate. How about coming up with a machine that would clean out the attic, tidy up the basement, or make more room in the garage, Mr. Hagedorn? Could you redesign the lawnmower to do that? If you could, you'd be doing something for us. We'd all like to be able to get two cars in our two-car garages. Could you arrange that?

As a matter of fact, you've got some work to do redesigning the lawnmower before you redesign grass. Forget about not mowing lawns. Figure out a place where we can put that damn lawnmower when we're done with it. It doesn't fit anywhere. We use it seven times a year and the rest of the time it's just in the way. Give us a lawnmower that folds up. The lawnmower takes up too much room that we need for other things like shovels, rakes, bicycles, gas cans. There isn't a mower of lawns among us who likes the design.

When I mow the lawn, I make a satisfying executive decision. The question is always whether to mow up and down, up and down, or across and across, across and across. Sometimes, I alternate the pattern of my mowing. I'll just keep going around and around in a diminishing oblong pattern until the patch in the middle gets small enough so that the mower's wheels span the strip of grass left and I can get it with one satisfying pass.

I'll bet Mr. Hagedorn thinks you ought to rake up the grass you've cut, too. I don't rake. I take the position that the clippings have all the nutrients the grass took up out of the earth while it grew. It's better to leave them and let them leach back into the soil. I think the clippings protect the roots of the grass from the sun. I've often raked together a pile of grass I've cut and stared at it. So nice. It seems as if it ought to be good to eat. If horses and cows find grass so delicious, why is it that humans never eat it? Fried in a little butter with salt and pepper? If grass turned out to be a delicacy, Mr. Hagedorn would regret the day he developed a lawn that hardly grew at all. Next time I mow the lawn, I may cook a few cups and have the neighbors over for grass.

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Case in point, on the same day that this article is submitted for publication it was reported by the Associated Press that U.S. Representative Patrick Kennedy (Democrat-R.I.) crashed his car near the Capital May 4, 2006 at 2:45 am. He told officers at the scene "he was late for a vote". The story goes on to report that Rep. Kennedy had returned to his Capitol Hill home earlier that evening after a final series of votes in Congress and took prescribed amounts of Phenergan which was prescribed for gastroenteritis one day earlier and Ambien which he takes occasionally. The congressman released a statement stating "Some time around 2:45 AM, I drove the few blocks to the Capital complex believing I needed to vote. Apparently, I was disoriented from the medication." The president of the Washington chapter of

the Fraternal Order of Police, who was not present at the scene of the accident, stated that the congressman appeared to be intoxicated but no sobriety tests were completed. The congressman had addressed this issue with his initial statement "I consumed no alcohol prior to the incident".

Politics aside and, without disparaging the character and reputation of the congressman based only on the information available this could be a classic case of sleep driving. Remember, somnambulism when described in simple terms is appropriate behavior at the inappropriate time. Rushing to vote is common and a way of life for most elected officials. Furthermore, debating and voting late at night is fairly frequent depending on the importance of the legislation pending on the floor.

On the other hand, it could be a clever legal defense learned from the recent rash of negative stories on the "ambien driver". As this incident takes a life of its own it behooves the sleep professionals to intervene and educate the general public. It would be very interesting to get more details (obviously without violating the congressman's privacy) on the circumstances leading to the accident, for example sleep debt, other medications, history of previous sleepwalking or family history of sleep disorders. Strangely enough, we know almost everything about this prominent American family including serious medical conditions and psychiatric disorders but nothing about sleeping habits.

Finally, as we counsel patients with parasomnias discussing the importance of avoiding precipitating factors and creating a safe sleep environment we must now add the recommendation of HIDE YOUR CAR KEYS!

