I HAD A DIALOGUE yesterday with the young adult offspring of a beloved colleague. We were talking about the fascistic dangers of that current national trend which New Yorker magazine refers to as a “monolithic Presidential system” of government (as opposed to the Constitutional system envisioned by our founding fathers). Comparisons to Hitler were of course inevitable, and when we got into the time-worn theme of “How did the Germans ever let it happen?” our dialogue turned into a monologue, which I hereby offer for what it’s worth (and I obviously think it’s worth something, otherwise I wouldn’t bother passing it along).

People thought Hitler was so obviously irrational beyond all credibility, and audacious beyond all bounds, that surely, if given enough rope, such a man was bound to hang himself sooner or later and probably much sooner than later. It was even thought by many that he would most likely rupture a blood vessel during one of his impassioned outbursts (like Dame Van Winkle in the Washington Irving tale—who departed this earth when she screamed too loudly at a passing peddler).
A number of us on this side of the ocean even considered him a buffoon—an impression which Chaplin's classic film, *The Great Dictator*, did little to dispel.

At that period in my own life I was so preoccupied with my parents' divorces/remarriages, AND my hoped-for career as a concert pianist, AND trying to conjugate irregular Latin verbs, AND trying to intuit whether God would hate/punish jerk-off Me for being pubertal, AND trying to comprehend why $X$ to the zero power equals *one* (instead of zero), AND whether girls liked me or boys liked me or whether I liked *them*, and what the hell to do/not do about it *anyway*, AND there was even a God at all or a Cosmos or Poetic Justice or Yang & Yin or Life-after-Death or was it all a dream, etc. So preoccupied was I, in fact, that I scarcely comprehended my own brothers' and best friends' growing-pains/joys—much less the agony of my farm neighbors down the road or the Grapes of Wrath nomads fleeing the Dust Bowl and even much less those brave Europeans making their dreadful, heart-in-throat dashes across the snow-fields toward beckoning woodlands beyond the Swiss border.

By the time WWII was over and I had served my stint as a merchant seaman, I was then preoccupied with my elder brother's death in Germany (the 8th Engineers were killed by our own mortar-fire which was intended to protect their Rhine crossing), AND my father's impending death of throat cancer, AND my step-mother's acute onset of paranoid schizophrenia, AND where to go and what to do with my young life. The eve of my 21st birthday found me sitting in a bathtub with the radio playing, a bottle of Scotch at my elbow, and a book open on a board in front of me (Shakespeare's *Richard II*—"Let us talk of graves..."). Not much room to think about anything other than bare survival. I think I sat there for several months, scarcely daring to venture down to the corner deli, so convinced was I that Somebody was conspiring to destroy me. To make a long story short (I realize it's far too late for *that*), by a fluke I stumbled into psychoanalysis (5 sessions per week; strict Freudian) and began the long road back to this incredible place where it's a joy to be alive and I would give anything to live forever in this most fascinating of worlds.

**Lives of Quiet Desperation**

Very dramatic, yes? Well, the point I made to my young friend was simply this: Most people carry very similar burdens and do indeed lead such "lives of quiet desperation" day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, year in and year out—ad infinitum—that they simply *don't have enough psychic energy left over* to achieve Maslow's "self-realization"—not to mention reaching the *top* of his