

SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

MY CAT FRANNY IS MEOWING; SHE WANTS AN- other treat. Don't we all. Republicans want to regain a majority in Congress this fall and take back the White House in 2012. What a treat that would be for the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans. With everything they have, so many of them are meowing for more: now, how rich is that? Of course, there's nothing wrong with Franny wanting more. She's not being sinful; it's animal behavior. Are the wealthiest Americans just a bunch of animals? Yes — and so are the rest of us: rich and poor; black and white; men with heavy beards and women with angelic complexions; Republican animals; Democratic animals; Christian and Jewish and Muslim animals. Imagine how much meowing God has to listen to.

AS INDEPENDENCE DAY APPROACHES, I WONDER what we're supposed to give a country on its 234th birthday. Solar panels on every roof? Extraordinary teachers in every school? An equitable tax system that demands more from the rich? How about a magic wand that turns slow trains into fast trains, and fast-food restaurants into slow-food restaurants, and all the charlatans in Congress into dedicated public servants? And while we're at it, how about tearing down that wall in our collective psyche that separates the present from the past? More than 15 million indigenous people occupied North America before Europeans arrived in the New World (new to the Europeans, at least). By 1910 — because of disease and war and forced migration — their numbers had been reduced to less than half a million. And today their existence is largely forgotten except as a plot device in Hollywood westerns. We celebrate the birth of our nation on the Fourth of July, but on what day do we mourn all those who died because of our ancestors' imperial ambitions?

I ADMIT IT: MY MEMORY ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO be. I forgot what number we're supposed to dial when we see the Supreme Court leaving the scene of a crime — for what else to call yesterday's 5–4 decision to kill campaign-finance reform? I don't remember why we're rounding up illegal aliens instead of the well-to-do Americans who illegally employ them. Nor can I recall just when President Obama promised that the next war we fight will be the most eco-friendly in history — our troops dressed in uniforms made of 100 percent organic cotton, our "green bombs" produced in factories constructed of straw bales. Maybe I heard it on National Public Radio, just before they announced that from now on all the news will be recycled, since nothing really changes, and it's wasteful to use a story just once.

MY NEIGHBOR A., A THERAPIST, SAYS SHE'S FED up with her leftist friends who have given up on the president.

"He inherited a gigantic mess," she says. "Imagine if I gave up on some of my most difficult clients after just one year."

BEFORE THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS ROLL AROUND, let me be clear: I'm not a candidate. Not for most devoted editor. Not for most devoted husband. Not for God's most devoted servant, down on my knees before the altar of truth, waxing the floor until it shines. I'm not promising to feed the hungry instead of reaching for a second helping. I'm not promising to open a nationwide chain of soup kitchens with linen tablecloths and a maitre d' who seats only the poorest of the poor. If nominated, I will not accept. If elected, I will not serve. If forced to take the oath, I will not promise to be the change you can believe in. If I do make such a promise, I promise not to keep it.

I'M TOO BUSY TO PRAY THIS MORNING. SURELY God will understand. Maybe he can reflect on how many people he's kept waiting — for a sign, for a cure, for a brief guest appearance in the mess they've made of their lives. Not that I think I could do any better, mind you. Look, I know that no one has it easy, not even God. Being God must be harder than being president of the United States. It must be harder than being someone who voted for the president now having to accept that Barack Obama is human after all.

OH AMERICA, WHY AREN'T YOU RICHER AND BET- ter looking? You're mooching off just about everyone now, especially China. Go ahead, break open the fortune cookie and see what it says. Shocking, isn't it? When I lived in New York, I used to eat Chinese food all the time; I want that entered in the record, just in case, since I'm now married to a woman who does not care for Chinese food. Imagine that: thumbing your nose at China! I hope I'm not blamed for it. Americans call that "guilt by association." Maybe the Chinese have a different name for it, but it's probably in Chinese. I wonder how long it will be before American children have to take Chinese — and I don't mean takeout.

I SLEPT SO SOUNDLY LAST NIGHT THAT I DIDN'T notice the earth revolving on its axis at more than a thousand miles per hour. I didn't hear the cries of the 120,000 babies who were born between 10 P.M. and 5 A.M., nor the cries of the 50,000 people who died. If any peace treaties were ripped up, I slept right through it. If any bombs fell on innocent civilians, I had a pillow over my head. All around the world, men and women were kissing and touching and being touched, and even from behind closed doors their moaning was insistent and unmistakable, yet hour after hour I lay curled on my side, eyes closed, breathing in and breathing out.