

## The Disposal Society

On a high shelf in my bathroom is the yellow bone-handled straight razor that belonged to my great-grandfather John Sanford. Three successive generations of men in my family have never had the heart to throw it away. In the wastebasket is a plastic razor by Bic. I paid 20 cents for it, I used it once and I tossed it.

In Old John's day, some wag lamented that what this country needed was a good 5-cent cigar. Americans never did get that. But nowadays we do get disposable diapers at 17 cents, use-once mousetraps for 50 cents and edible underpants in cherry, banana and passion-fruit flavors, \$ 5 each.

And we buy these things, we use them lightly and we discard them. We toss so much that it takes 30,000 trash trucks to take it from sight. No fewer than 133 million tons of waste are hauled away annually. To where? In 27 states by the 2010 s, landfills will be just that - filled. For months, off our shores wandered a garbage barge nobody wanted, a fly-swarmed scow that became a national disgrace and an international joke.

The Disposal Society, some call us, and no wonder. Americans make the most exotic waste the world has known. To loft a satellite into the sky, we craft a rocket we use but once. Job done, it falls into the sea. The heavens, too, are littered with our leavings. So that an astronaut may ride on lunarscape, we make a "moon rover". It costs tens of millions of dollars. It is ridden once. It is left behind. For eternity, the moon is a used-car lot.

The ordinary of the lives of our forebears - the things they shaved with, told time by - they are our art and artifacts now. The things we use to do these same things to face the day - they are our forget-me-nots, things that will break but won't decay and will stay underfoot forever. They give new meaning to the Statue of Liberty's legend : "Wretched refuse of your teeming shore."

John S. LANG, *U.S. News & World Report*.