

The **UNDERGROUND** Grope

History of *THE GROPE*, Part I

by A. G. Groper

EDITORIAL NOTE: The following are the views of one person. While many of the facts are fairly accurate, some have been slightly altered. Kind of like a made-for-TV movie. (Actually, more like a PBS documentary since it gets kinda boring. Don't read this article on the throne or you may fall asleep, slip off, and hit your head on the sink or tub.)

For months, scores of people from across the country have been wondering "what happened to *The Grope*?" And not just the people who subscribed. Friends and relatives of subscribers who hurriedly borrowed copies on their way to the *library* are curious. ("I need something to read *now*.") Co-workers of subscribers who happened across back issues while rummaging through a desk that wasn't theirs are curious. ("Hey, while you were at lunch I needed a

paperclip and, um, I figured you would have one handy so, um, I took a quick peek in your desk. Hope you don't mind. By the way, I found your *Group Grope* newsletter in the bottom drawer under your copy of the employee handbook. What's up with that?") Mailpersons are curious. ("Man, it's been a long time since I intercepted some good reading material. I wonder what happened to that *Group Grope*. Maybe I should put an uzzi to someone's temple and get some answers.")

So basically a lot of people are curious. Yet, for every "what happened" query from a forlorned former reader, there are likely two or more who have asked the question "What was *The Grope*?" Thus, for those who missed out on the glory days of a now dormant publication (Mommy... it's not moving... is it dead?), we shall start at the beginning.

THE BEGINNING

In the beginning there was... well, never mind where I think things began. Let's just jump ahead to the early 1990's. A time when strong friendships grew from frequent social contact. Weekend trips, movie nights, and last minute dinner plans where ten people would show up were common. It seemed like every week something was going on and it often included a chance to meet someone new or catch up with

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**It Ain't Queer
If You
Like
It**

New Year's Eve

Rumor has it that Christopher will once again be hosting a New Year's Eve celebration at his Berkley home. Details are sketchy since he declined to be interviewed for this article. (Actually, we never got around to calling him.) However, based on years past, we expect the event to begin sometime after 8:00 p.m. on December 31. Christopher usually provides SOME beer, but since he doesn't drink beer it will probably be something crappy. (Like Michelob... in a can.) Serious beer drinkers are advised to bring their own. Soft drinks are also likely to be provided, however attendees have traditionally been advised to bring their own champagne for a toast at midnight. Also, offers to bring munchables to share have been well received in the past. So feel free to volunteer.

Christopher has been hosting this annual event since 1989, except for the December '94 / January '95 holiday. Those who know him well and find him to be predictable see the beginning of a *5 year on / 1 year off* pattern developing. Extrapolating into the future, they anticipate spending December 31, 1999 with him. "We're doomed... we're all doomed," said one source who wished to remain anonymous. "But I hope to be with friends when anarchy and chaos sweeps across the globe at 12:00 a.m. on January 1, 2000," he added. Another person later chimed in with "When computers start crashing and planes and satellites start dropping from the sky like dead bugs from the side of a bug zapper, Christopher's house will be about as safe as any other suburban home, so I'll probably stop by."

But enough about Y2K worries. We still have New Year's Eve '97 and '98 to deal with. So, for those interested in spending quality time with the Oz-man and his buds this December 31, we suggest you give him a call to let him know that you are planning to stop by. You know, just to make sure he's going to be there.

Words for the timid... Don't be waiting for a formal invitation or a personal phone call from the man himself. Call him up and invite yourself over. If you don't and you end up sitting at home by yourself cleaning the lint out of your belly button while watching Dickie at Time Square on the boob tube, it's your own damn fault.

GROPE History

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someone you hadn't seen in a while. "What's going on with The Group?" became a common expression and everyone was willing to make a few calls to pass the word.

I don't remember how or when people started referring to our collection of friends as "The Group," but it's easy to see how it happened. One day it was "How'z about we get a bunch of people together for a movie night," the next day it was "Let's get The Group together for a BBQ." It was easier to say "The Group" than to list off the 20 or so people who needed to be invited and everyone knew who "The Group" was.

THE GROUP

So now we had this circle of friends who, for the sake of conversational convenience, referred to themselves as "The Group." It was cute, but far from original. I think they even used the expression on an episode of "Friends" once. I'm sure it's not uncommon to have groups of friends that are a dozen or so in size, but then something happened that I think was very unique. Population exploded. It seemed like a group of 15 or 20 grew to 60, and then more, in just a few years.

It was amazing. There was no formal marketing machine. This wasn't an organized social club, fraternity, or a bunch of street people who happen to use the same shelter. These people became friends just because they enjoyed each others company. Imagine 60 or 70 intelligent people who are all friends with each other *just because*. Not because they belonged to the same travel club. Not because they all went to the same school or worked at the same company. People became friends because they showed up once, had a good time, and kept showing up.

At the time, we had time and geography on our side. Most of us didn't have a significant other and few lived outside of the Detroit area. It was easy to participate in last minute get-togethers because few had to deal with dinner at the in-laws and a half hour drive was no big deal. Obviously, this couldn't last.

At some point population seemed to peak out. People started to get busier with work, family, and their main squeezes. ("Honey, do you want to do something with The Group tonight or do you want to have sex?") Some moved out of the area, including out-of-state. Gatherings decreased in frequency and required more planning. We needed something to get the momentum moving again, or at least keep what we had. Otherwise, ten years from now, we might each be sitting around wondering "What ever happened to...?" Staying in touch with a dozen friends is difficult. Staying in touch with 50 or 60 is almost impossible.

THE GROUP GROPE

Young, ambitious, and perhaps a bit naive, some of us wanted the impossible. There had to be a simple way for all of us to stay in touch with each other. The summer of 1995 saw several conversations regarding the deterioration of The

Group and how sad it was that people were starting to drift apart. During one of those conversations someone suggested a newsletter. Someone else jokingly suggested calling it *The Group Grope*. It may have been suggested as a joke, but a few people thought it was a great idea.

One of those people was Mr. O. "Why not?" he thought. "Everyone would have a chance to contribute, we could charge a nominal subscription amount to cover copying and postage, it would be fun, and it would help people stay in touch with each other." He decided that he was going to make it happen, but he needed help. So he started by approaching others who thought it was a good idea. Ms. B. was one of the first.

She had thought about it too, but knew how much work it would be and realized that geography was working against her since she was one of the people who had moved away from the Detroit area. When Mr. O. approached her in October, 1995, she was quick to volunteer. It was decided that they would share editing responsibilities. Mr. O. would put together the even months, Ms. B. the odd. *The Group Grope* was born.

Mr. O. started with a pilot edition in December, 1995, so that people could see what he had in mind and to solicit subscribers at the low, low price of 69 cents an issue. The goal was 50 readers. Otherwise it probably wasn't worth the effort. People loved it and the goal was quickly reached.

1996 became the year of *The Grope*. Twelve entertaining and somewhat informative issues were published and many of the initial objectives were met. A few personality conflicts arose along the

way but are, hopefully, long since resolved. It was fun, but it turned out to be more work than Mr. O., Ms. B., and some of the regular writers had anticipated. By the end of the year interest was waning. The end was near.

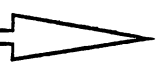
After a flurry of resignations, Mr. M. decided to try to keep it alive. He spread the word and published one issue in 1997, but it was no use. When a few people asked him what happened, he responded with "*The Grope is dead.*" Lack of interest seemed to be the main reason. Apparently, a newsletter was not our key for staying in touch with each other after all.

THE FUTURE

Over the last year or so, many new friendships have been formed. The days of everyone knowing each other are gone. More and more, "the group" is once again just a generic expression for referring to a bunch of people. For many it has always been that way. Yet, for some, it will always refer to a group of special friends.

Is *The Grope* dead? In many ways it is. But hopefully the spirit behind it is not. If our goal is to stay in touch with our friends, we still have the power to do so. Don't just think mutual funds when investing for your future. Invest some time in your friendships. It may get a little harder each year, but the return on investment can be astounding.

Young, ambitious, and perhaps a bit naive, some of us wanted the impossible. There had to be a simple way for all of us to stay in touch with each other.



Jerkery

Ho Ho's, Liverwurst and Cheese Logs

by A. Jerk

(warning: don't jump to conclusions without sufficient evidence or you may find yourself in need of counsel to defend charges resulting from any slanderous statements you may unwittingly make.)

No matter what form your theistic beliefs may take, if in fact you have any, this is the time of year when giving is commonplace and good cheer abounds. While it is important to remember why you are celebrating your preferred holiday(s), it can be equally important to cough up the goods. This is particularly true in the case of family and, where applicable, that special someone. In the case of the latter, this can be extremely important if you ever hope to *get any* again. Thus, with the advent of the gift giving season, many of us are facing the unpleasant dilemma of what to buy *so-and-so*. (*So-and-so* being that hard-to-buy-for person in your life.) With that in mind, here are some ideas that may help:

- Are any of your relatives employed in the oldest profession? Maybe a sister or an aunt? I've got the perfect gift idea... Ho Ho's. Now this may sound

ridiculous at first, kinda like buying a tax preparation gift-certificate for a CPA. But unlike an accountant, it isn't always easy for a working girl to use her talents for her own benefit. It may be difficult for her to *scratch her own itch*. So why not hire some professionals to take care of her needs? You don't have to be there for her to *be there for her*.

- The thermos. One of man's greatest inventions. You put something hot in it - it stays hot. You put something cold in it - it stays cold. No switches, not dials, no power source needed. How does it know whether to keep its contents hot or cold? It just knows. Indeed, truly amazing. Best of all... they come with a cup built right in!

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Astrology?

by Pullem Outamyass

ARIES There will be a full moon sometime soon. If it isn't cloudy you may get a chance to see it. Best Sex: While Mooning.

TAURUS New car smell doesn't last forever, so it may as well be replaced with an odor you enjoy. Mmm... Vanilla? Best Sex: In a Taurus.

GEMINI Put on a hat and watch out for low hanging lamps or you'll be seeing double. Best Sex: While listening to Double Vision by Foreigner.

CANCER You've smelled the soap. You've smelled the peanut butter. Now take time to smell some roses. Best Sex: In a field of wild flowers.

LEO Your inner lion will roar with pride... or passion. Keep doors and windows shut or the neighbors may call the cops. Best Sex: In a sound proofed room.

VIRGO A new place to call home will bring more happiness than grief in '98. Be patient and remember that no place is perfect. Don't let a leaky faucet or broken garbage disposal bring you down. Best Sex: In the rumpus room.

LIBRA Quit worrying about which moon is lined up with which star and live the life you've got. If you don't like it, do something about it. Best Sex: Whenever you want. (But you have to want it.)

SCORPIO You know that the people who believe in this crap are a bit warped. (Not that there is anything wrong with that.) Most "astrologists" just make shit up. Best Sex: After reading your horoscope and dismissing it as hooey.

SAGITTARIUS What's gonna happen is gonna happen. Take the bad with the good, but in smaller portions if possible. Best Sex: When your partner is a little bit bad. (*Does someone need to be spanked?*)

CAPRICORN The new year will bring great joy for you and your significant other. Best Sex: Between the sheets. (After Chinese food.)

AQUARIUS A bad day at work doesn't have to ruin your whole week. Take a bubble bath by candle light then walk through the house naked. Best Sex: When you're squeaky clean.

PISCES Put out a sign that says "gone fishin'," even if you don't fish. Best Sex: Before or after things get fishy. (But not during.)

Death of The Grope

by S. Body

What happened to *The Grope* -

Where has it gone?

Who owns the BIG dog that

shit on my lawn?

What's going on in the lives of my friends?

Will there be peace on earth before my life ends?

Questions abound - some simple, some not.

I don't have all the answers, but I'll give it a shot.

Let's see...

I don't really care about the big dog.

I just wish the owner had cleaned up his log.

Peace on earth? - Uh huh... Yea... Right.

Someone will always be picking a fight.

The Grope? - It's dead. Or so I have heard.

Rumors to the contrary are somewhat absurd.

My pals and their lives? -

I should give them a call.

And that's the advice I give to you all.

Poetry
Corner

Jerkery

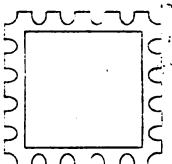
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- Here's an idea that takes a little planning. Casually look through the person's living quarters and pick out a small appliance that you can afford to replace. Toasters and blenders work well. If they have a dog, unplug the unit and squash a big ball of liverwurst around part of the cord. (If they have a cat, no need to unplug.) With any luck, the pet will chew through the cord while consuming the sandwich spread and render the unit unuseful. Your loved one will invariably share with you their tale of woe as it relates to the item and you will have your gift idea. Note: If they don't have a pet, chew through the cord yourself. When the person asks for your help to figure out what happened just blame it on rats.
 - Perhaps the best gift idea is right under your nose. Are you a member of a music club? Did one of the CDs in your last shipment really stink? Slap some wrapping paper on it and, bada-bing, you avoid the hassle of trying to return it and your gift idea problem is solved. This idea also works well with books and videos. Now may be the perfect time to ditch the copy of "Home for the Holidays" that you picked up in the K-mart sale bin.
- Ok then, that ought to give you a good start. But wait - there's more! You may have already thought of this, but it would be remiss of me not to mention it. Re-gifting. Dig out the cheese log that Aunt Bertha gave you last year. Slap a bow on the ficus you

inherited when cousin Louis moved out-of-state and didn't have room on the truck. The holidays are a great time to clean house. The good stuff goes to the relatives and the worn out coats go to goodwill.

And don't forget about that ugly sweater your sister gave you. You never wore it and the tags are still on it. Why not give it to her husband? That way you don't have to spend money on your deadbeat brother-in-law who never returns the tools he borrows and you don't come off looking like a cheap ass. You'll be happy with your decision when you open your gift from them and find that it's a drill that looks strangely familiar. "Wow sis, I've been looking for one *just like this*."

HAPPY HOLIDAYS !!!



The Grope