I've been suffering from an inferiority complex ever since reading about that 15-letter Finnish palindrome for a soap-dealer, SAIPPUA-KAUPPIAS. Surely the English language can come up with something longer than the 7-letter ROTATOR, REPAPER or DEIFIED. (Yes, I know of the 9-letter MALAYALAM and the 11-letter KINNIKINNIK variant, but these are both borrowed words from non-European languages.)

In my home town there used to be a cafe named the ENIDINE, a one-word echo of the better-known YREKA BAKERY of California, but, alas, it is no more. Still, it enables me to make a point: using a little imagination, one can easily create long palindromes:

REDIVIDER one who, not trusting his new hand computer, carries out the division by hand
SEMIDIMES nickels
SEMILIMES new citrus fruit recently featured on soft-drink commercials (half lime and half lemon)
SEMIRIMES output of bad poets who can get only half their lines to rhyme
DEMITIMED only one-fourth as traumatic as being two-timed
MINIMINIM a really small minim
NONALANON not quite enough of a souse to need AA's services
RELEVELER a perfectionist who smooths out the bumps in his lawn left by an incompetent gardener

Did you ever hear of the man whose wife was always complaining about the wallpaper in her room? Once when she went to visit her mother, he decided to surprise her by having the room repapered. But when she returned, she didn't like the color, so she had it all ripped off. At this point, one could presumably say that her walls had been DEREPAPERED.

There is a large training school for mimes -- I am not at liberty to reveal its location -- which long ago accepted the fact that the mimes who command the highest performance fees are midgets, known in the trade as minims. Inflationary pressures and greedy agents have lately pushed minim fees up to such outrageous levels that many customers have complained to the school about it. Ever alert to serve the public, the school has responded by instituting a new category of mimes whose size and fee is midway between regular mimes and minims. Of course, these performers are called SEMIMINIMIMES.
There's good news and bad news about the possible word for a pre-med student in the groves of Academe. The good news is that it has fourteen letters, but the bad news is that it lacks a final P of being a palindrome: PREMEDACADEMER.

I used to have a cousin-in-law in Belleville, Illinois whose last name was Reeb. Belleville is even today a very German community, and beer and beer-drinking are an integral part of life there. While hoisting one in Belleville, I used to imagine my cousin-in-law setting up his own brewery to produce REEB BEER. That good palindromic phrase I soon rejected, though, in favor of REEB REGAL LAGER BEER. This is much longer and equally palindromic but, alas, still a phrase instead of a single word.

But wait! The Germans always like to crunch their phrase words together in long unbroken strings, so the name of my cousin-in-law's hypothetical brewery becomes REEBREGALLAGERBEER.

Top that, Finland!

A DICTIONARY OF COGNATES

Ever look up a word in a dictionary and find yourself spending the next twenty minutes following up references to related words? Such dictionary-browsers will enjoy Edward C. Pinkerton's 423-page hardcover book, Word For Word (Gale Research Company, 1982). It consists of sixty short chapters, each tracing the linguistic genealogy of widely-differing descendants of a single proto-Indo-European word (inferred to exist more than six millennia ago). Each chapter is written in a dense, information-packed style, as the following excerpt (on descendants of the Indo-European root dhe- 'to set, to put'):

Less obvious compounds are OFFICE a place where work is done; a public position' (literally) 'a doing of work' (via French from Latin officium 'performance of duty'; from opus 'work' + facere 'to do' (see line 7735)) . . .

It's best to read this book in small bits, lest literary indigestion ensue. The book is not cheap ($32 if ordered from Verbatim, Box 668, Essex CT 06426), but the amateur etymologist or dedicated word-lover should not be deterred. Pinkerton writes with authority and occasional humor ('"PROLAN, 'a hormone found in high concentration in the urine of pregnant women' which is harmful to rabbits').