

# THE LISTMAKER

DAVE MORICE

Iowa City, Iowa

I have a habit of making up lists. My very first list, which I wrote in first grade, was a list of all lists I wanted to make in the future. That list began with my second list, which was called "a list of my very first list". My third list came next, but I lost it soon after I made it. My fourth was a list of lists I'd lost. My fifth was a list of things that might have been on my third list. My sixth was a list of titles I might have given my third list. My seventh was a list of lists that have something to do with my third list, which included my fourth through sixth lists, as well as my seventh. My eighth was a list of lists that had nothing to do with my third list. This included my first and second lists and most, if not all, of my future lists. It didn't include my eighth list, which I added to my seventh list. Then I found my third list. I made a list of lists that I'd lost and later found. I also made a list of lists that I didn't need anymore, which included my fourth through eighth lists. I threw them away and listed them on my lists of lists that I'd thrown away.

I'm working on a list right now, but it's a tricky one. I call it "a list of unlistable things". There's nothing on that list yet, but I hope to come up with something soon. I'm also working on a list of unlistable lists. There's nothing on that one yet, either. Nor is there anything on my list of lists that have nothing on them, because I don't consider something a list until it has at least one thing listed. Those lists go on my list of one-thing lists. If I wind up adding a second thing to a one-thing list, I then list it in my list of two-thing lists.

Some of my two-thing lists were previously on my list of lists of any length that could have only one more thing added. If I add something to one of the lists on my list of things that could have only one more thing added, I then add that list to my list of things that can't have anything else added. Oddly enough, I sometimes wind up adding another thing to those lists anyway! I realized that dismal fact a few days ago, so I made a master list of all lists that had one or more things added and a list of dismal facts. The dismal fact list had only one thing on it. When I realized that dismal fact, I added it to the list of dismal facts and to the list of additions to the list of dismal facts. I also made a list of all lists that have never had anything added, as well as a list of all lists that have had something removed.

I realized with chagrin that I needed to make a list of removed things so I wouldn't forget what was removed. I made the list and also a list of things that I realized with chagrin. I ran across my dismal fact list and realized with chagrin that I hadn't added anything to it for awhile. I added that realization to my chagrin list, and noticed that both lists now had two things each, so I added them both to my two-thing list. The dismal fact is I'd been neglecting my two-thing list. I added that fact to my dismal fact list, which made it a three-thing list. The dismal fact is that I didn't have a three-thing list, I realized with chagrin, and would have to make one. But my dismal fact list now had

four things on it, and, I realized with chagrin, that adding that realization to my chagrin list meant that my chagrin list now had four things on it, too.

I wasn't planning on making a four-thing list. Instead, I made a list of lists that I'd never make, which began with a four-thing list and continued on with a whole bunch of other lists, from a list of people who look like their neighbors' pets to a list of meals I'd wished I'd never eaten. I realized that I wasn't sure about never making a list of people who look like their neighbors' pets, so I took it off my list of lists I'd never make and put it on my list of lists I might make someday. That list includes a list of trapeze artists who quit the circus to become airline pilots and a list of questions one shouldn't ask a deep sea diver at the bottom of the ocean. I decided to remove the list of deep sea diver questions because I remembered I'd started making that exact same list when I was a teenager but stopped because it seemed impossible to complete. I added it to my lists of incomplete lists and to my list of impossible lists.

The other day I found my first list, which, as I mentioned at the beginning, was a list of all lists I'd wanted to make in the future. I chuckled when I read it. There were only 23 lists on it, including a list of lists with only 23 things on them. There was also a sheet of paper with "a list of incomprehensible things" written on it and nothing else. I can't figure out what I had in mind when I wrote the title, but it still seemed like a perfectly good list to make, so I put it on my list of perfectly good lists to make. Since I wasn't certain when I could work on it, I put that on my list of uncertain things, and I put my list of uncertain things on my list of incomprehensible things; it seemed certain that if something were incomprehensible it would also be uncertain, and vice versa. I added that fact to my list of certain things and to my list of things ending in "vice versa".

I don't have a favorite list, but two lists come close--my list of favorite things and my list of near-favorite lists, both of which are on my list of things that appear together in the same list. My favorite list on my list of near-favorite lists is my list of unlisted telephone numbers. It's at the top of several other lists, too, including my list of unlisted things, my list of meaningful yet random numbers, my list of things related to telephones, my list of things that people don't want everyone to know, my list of secrets associated with ringing sounds, my list of things not listed in the telephone book, and my list of things that operators can't give out.

Now and then I wonder what my last list will be. Since there's no way to know, there's also no way to know what my second-to-last list will be, or my third-, fourth-, fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-to-last lists. If I knew, I'd also know how many lists I've made, and if I knew that, I'd be able to make a list of all my lists, the ultimate master list, which would reveal the meaning of my existence. After all, life is a great series of lists, from the first list to the last. If I stopped making lists, I'd know what the last list was, but life after the last list would be meaningless. Besides, how would I know that it really was the last list I'd ever make? Someday, years after I'd stopped, I might decide to make another list, perhaps a list of groceries or a list of dalmatians. Then life would have meaning again, but I wouldn't know the meaning, because I wouldn't know the last list.