what AMERICA was once about and maybe still is but barely hanging by its fingernails. but it's not what the insurance companies are about. and it's not what communism or puritanism or fascism or just about any "-ism" except maybe existentialism or individualism are about. existentialism in fact didn't just say you could be free — it said you couldn't escape your freedom, but millions of people are doing their damnedest to.

and a few weeks later my friend cowboy bob is quietly replying to a drunk lady who is demanding to know why he is always getting into arguments and fights, what exactly it is that he wants out of life, what it is that he lives for, and cowboy bob tells her,

"i only live for two things. the first is freedom. so is the second."

COPS GET STRESS-DISABILITY PENSIONS

sitting in the waiting room of the emergency ward after having thrown up blood while on anti-coagulants, an episode he largely ascribes to the old academic pressures of overwork and underpay, and the new one of committees dominated by evangelical feminists and students encouraged to embrace every current sociopolitical excuse for their own deficiencies, toad spies a sign beneath the t.v. which says, "warning: do not touch,"

but which at first he reads as,

"warning: do not teach."

I WAS ALWAYS THE LAST ON THE BLOCK TO RECEIVE HIS SECRET DECODER RING

the teenaged counter girl at wendy's asks, "would you like a discount, sir?"
"what discount?"

"we have a senior citizen discount, sir."

"oh ... how old do you have to be ... i'm only fifty-two."

now she colors slightly and says, "it ... it doesn't really matter. would you like the discount, sir?"

"sure," i say: "why not?"

my first senior citizen discount and i don't even really enjoy it. but i'm sure it's one of many things that i'll be getting used to now.

DOING MY DENNIS HOPPER IMITATION

i smiled goodbye to the pretty receptionist at the ymca pool and went to store my gym bag in the trunk before driving home. but as i spread my towel and bathing suit to dry, a pair of jockey shorts fell out. i knew there were two pairs, an extra clean pair and the one i'd worn to the pool, so, instinctively, i raised this one to my nose to ascertain which one was which. they were the fresh ones, but my eyes fell on the sweet young thing who'd followed me out with the membership card i'd left back at the desk.

THE LAST COMIDA

it had been at least a year since i had eaten at pancho's, a place that for over thirty years has been serving good, plentiful, and inexpensive meals to students, families, and older people in a bright, clean, no-frills setting, supervised, both kitchen and dining room, by pancho and his family.

tonight i ordered, a la carte, a chorizo tostada, a chicken enchilada, and a beer. no soup, no salad, no rice,