



## BOXING EVAN RATLIFF

By Evan Ratliff

Welcome to the box that contains my thoughts. Make yourself at home. Have a Tom Collins. Note the comfortable cardboard at your back, the sharply defined edges and borders, the hand-hold perforations designed for peeking through to the outside world.

I know you've been trying to "think outside" of a box quite similar to this one for some time now. You imagine that just outside are ideas so original that no ordinary, starched-shirt schmo could possibly conceive them. In advertising strategy sessions, real estate brochures, and parent-teacher conferences alike, you envision yourself bursting from the box like a great metaphor bursting from a writer's pen.

You may feel alone in your fleeing the box. Take comfort: According to the Nexis database of column-filler statistics, in the past year nearly 800 publications removed various forms of thinking from the box. Architecture, the NBA draft, flower arrangements, politics, and even, according to one report, the entire population of Canada have been liberated from their six-sided cardboard prisons.

Knowing all of this, I started thinking (still inside here), "What is the source of this anti-box sentiment?" Sure, I can see the relative merits of practicing Evangelism Outside the Box, as one book advocates. But is Tying the Knot Outside the Box really going to end in a happy marriage? Is Dancing Outside the Box even safe? Someone must stop this box exodus madness. That someone is me.

Then, like a UPS delivery, the answer came to me: What we really need is a bigger box. Imagine your own giant, crate-like container where your creative thoughts might bounce off the walls like small, bouncy balls. An arcade of thinking space, without shame.

So I say to you: Rage, rage against this defection from the box. We may, in fact, not even need a bigger one. Since the content providers and banner ad salesmen have moved out, it's kind of roomy in here, stripped of the gray-flannel, Organization Man aesthetic. I find that most of my thoughts, which I'll admit are not as inspired as, say, a Heinz EZ Squirt bottle, already fit inside—with room for an ottoman.

We would all be wise to heed the words of the *Houston Chronicle's* pet-advice columnist, responding to an inquiry on this very topic:

"It's possible Uncle Harry came to visit and he stressed the cats," he writes, "leading them to go outside the box. Now they're in the habit, even though Uncle Harry is long gone. Are you scooping frequently?"

Next time you decide to leave the box, stop and ask yourself these critical questions: Is Uncle Harry stressing you out? Has your struggle to think outside the box become the new box? And, most importantly, are you scooping frequently?