A Lot of Dough

This week, Bill Gates is worth $50 billion and I'm not.

I don't begrudge him the financial success. Why should I be jealous?

It is of course, my own fault that I am not the possessor of 50 billion dollars, just as it is your lack of initiative, or perhaps your contentment with a more pedestrian portfolio that keeps you out of the billion-dollar club.

What would we do with 50 billion dollars, anyway?

Well, you and I, being socially conscious and caring people, would give it all away, wouldn't we? And by doing so we would prove that the reason we didn't have billions before is that we never wanted billions.

But suppose we were shallow and self-absorbed.

I see swimming pools and beach vacations, jets and yachts, island property and that ranch in New Mexico I've been thinking about.

A while back, An American Demographics magazine pawed through some statistics and discovered that rich people do find ways to dispose of income.

How about a $55,000 trip around the world in a private supersonic Concorde, or some jewelry from Tiffany's?

Keith Ervin, a Times business reporter, did a story last December on the recent influx of stores aimed at the sort of folks for whom a $100 bill looks like a penny.

He mentioned Barcelino, a Beuevue men's clothing store where a customer has spent more than $23,000 in a single visit.

Lots of stores like that have located in Seattle or have plans to open a shop to sop up some of that money. He reported there are about 59,000 families around the Sound with at least $1 million.

Even so, there is only so much stuff you can use.
Average folks spend 96 percent of annual after-tax income each year. The rich spend only about two-thirds of their after-tax income each year, which means money keeps accumulating and they keep getting richer.

A million dollars is flea food next to the porterhouse steak Gates has. If you or I had $50 billion, we could spend a million a year for 50,000 years. (Actually, we’d be spending only the interest, so we’d never run out of money.) Look at it another way: It is a $50,000-a-year salary for a million years.

Bill, a little pointer: Invest in some congressional friends. Money does a body good.

I know, I shouldn't go on like this about money. Money is evil, or lust for it is, anyway. There's that eye of the camel thing, and there is always everyone's favorite money-can't-buy happiness examples: the Kennedys' wealth, fame, power, looks and misery.

But, hey, it beats starvation.

We are all mature enough to know that the business of America is making green.

People don't flock here so that they can have the freedom to vote; they come to make money.

Money buys choices. People with money have options when opportunities or problems arise.

Money also buys a little security. A lot of people in the middle class have a very loose grip on financial stability; a little bad luck and it's back to the government cheese.

It wasn't until I tasted brie that I realized that USDA surplus commodities weren't the last word in fine cuisine. I used to have a chip on my shoulder about the rich. Maybe I still so have a little of that, but I also think we've been lecturing the wrong people about the evils of money.

Poor people are a captive audience for people who believe in social justice and want a world that is not driven by greed. Seems as though it is the wrong way around.
Tell rich people money is bad. Tell poor people to get some quick.

I'm not poor anymore, but I could always use more money. I want everyone out there reading this to send me a dollar. Ask your friends and neighbors to send me a dollar and write to your relatives in Ohio and ask them to send money.

Remember, a newspaper column is software, too. I promise you that if I become a billionaire, I will not forget your help.

Oops. I think there might be some company rule against solicitations. Never mind.