Took the dog to the vet to get his nether parts expressed. I don’t know how long he’d had this problem; you don’t spend a lot of time lifting your dog’s tail to see what condition his condition is in. But my wife noted an anomaly – and yes, I’m going to use every possible euphemism available here – and asked if dogs got -

Thinking of a good way to put this -

Thinking -

Okay, you’ve heard the expression “dogpile”? Okay. That. For some reason the phrase “impacted gland” came to mind, and let me tell you, that’s one Google Image Search you can’t unsee. We got him in on Saturday morning, and off we went with Natalie and her friend, who was over to play for the day and regarded a trip to the event as a grand opportunity to see cats and dogs BECAUSE THEY’RE SO CUUUUTE.

Jasper, as ever, stood by the door and looked out, refusing to accept any of this. He whined, and yawned – something I’d bet 98% of people misinterpret

RECENT COMMENTS

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Amanda from Michigan on Boo. Hiss
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– and ignored the other dogs. There were two snooty poodles and one ancient
dog with red eyes like an old alcoholic. One cat hunched in its crate staring
venom at everyone. When we were called a very sweet vet took him back
into another room for drainage; Jasper trotted off without complaint. Upon
returning she said that he had indeed been overbrimming in the back-
department glandular genre, but the item we’d observed was still in
evidence. It was either some sort of infection due to the overinflated gland, or
a benign tumor, or a not-benign tumor. In the last two cases she did not
recommend removal. I knew why: if it’s benign, and it’s not in harm’s way,
whisper words of wisdom, let it be. If it’s not benign, well . . .

She didn’t have to say it; he’s 14 next month.

We got some antibiotics in case it is an infection, and said we’d see her in
April for his annual.

I’m not worried. I can’t say why, but I’m not. He’s old; he’s stiff in the
morning, which is why I have to help him down the stairs lest he body-surf
half the way. But it’s not his time. My wife took him for a walk the afternoon
after his appointment, and they were gone an hour. I’ve been around old
dogs who’ve had enough and smelled it all; they just exist, they walk with a
pained gait, they slump, they stare, they take no joy in anything. Jasper
spends most of his day sitting on the sofa dozing in the sun, but bring a pizza
in the house and he’s a puppy. Tell him it’s time for a walk and he’s up and at
‘em. It’s not his time. There’s a spring coming, and he’ll smell it before any of
us.

**Saturday night** it was time for Tableau Festive, the Crazy Uke’s name for our
sporadic meat-and-whiskey consumption events. It’s the old college gang:
myself, the aforementioned Uke, the Giant Swede, and Wes the Perfesser.
(Wes was previously the Filmmaker, but since he’s now a teacher at a local
university, he deserves a professorial upgrade to his moniker.) The Giant
Swede for years has been in charge of the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, more
or less. I exaggerate, but not by much; the actual job title is Facilities Manager
for Northwest. You may have head that Northwest is no more. Delta has a
different way of doing things, so he’s on the way out, looking for a new job.
The Crazy Uke is in the mortgage industry. I’m in newspapers. So no one’s
exactly sitting around wondering what to do with the calluses we have on
our thumbs from excessive twiddling.

We ate at Erte, a difficult thing to say after two whiskys; it’s an incredible
restaurant in NE across from the venerable 331 bar. Steak was consumed,
stake so tender you could actually absorb it topically if you liked. Live music
in the corner. Full house. At one point we all went outside for the post-meal
cigar – the Uke knows the owner & staff, so they didn’t mind that the entire
table got up and left after the meal – and we asked a lone smoker outside to
take our picture.
She was drunk.

Then we called Jack. This will probably be a new term for High Spirits, and I'm surprised it took me this long to think of it. Have a good time last night? I was about this close to calling Jack.

That would be Jack V., aka Jet Varhar, the Colonel of the Armenian Liberation Army, the Missing Man. Every old gang has one. If you have an old gang, that is. The members of the Tableau Festive go back, way back; the Uke and the Swede grew up together, but we all coalesced at the fabled Valli in the late 70s, and have never lost touch. Jack went back to Cali, got a good job, married a good woman, and got happy. Two dogs and a pool. He was never happy when we knew him; he was the true Tragic Figure of the Valli, the man who got off the train in Minneapolis – for love! Which didn't work out, of course – and spent half a decade in grim despond, chain-smoking Marlboros in the Valli basement, radiating a bleak caustic mood that could peel skin down to bone. Sometimes. The rest of the time he was cheerful and merry and a boon companion, and he was also mercilessly intelligent. He had a degree in philosophy. He was actually en route to grad school elsewhere when he got off the train in Minneapolis – for love, as noted – and while he intended to go back to grad school, he became trapped in the tarpits of the Valli, where all around him people made arguments that were logically meretricious. His was the most incisive mind I'd ever met. He saw through everyone's BS, which can be a terrible curse when it comes to your friends.

As I said, he went back to Cali, got a good job, married a good woman, got two dogs and pool. If someone made a movie about the Valli, I suppose he would have been the one who sold out, but no: he's happy, and he's as smart as ever. Life for him is fine. And now and then, when he least expects it, the phone rings: four guys from the olden times standing outside in Minnesota, full of meat and Irish fluids, calling just to say HEY. YOU. Every time we get
together, we miss you. To be frank, your name doesn't even have to come up. We're not even telling old stories. But Wes gets out the phone, starts talking, laughs, hands it over, and we know it's you.

I may never actually see Jack again, but if I get a call in 2039, and it's Wes, and he says “It's Jack,” well, off we'll go to LA. There are some people you meet at certain times in your life; you could not see them face to face for forty years, and still do 30 minutes from the heart at their wake.

Depressing, any of this? On the contrary. “It's Forty-two degrees,” said the Swede when he picked me up. That would be 52 degrees warmer than it had been earlier in the week. When we got to the bar we had the usual toast: Tableau Festive.

I had a second toast: to heads above water. The earth is a sea that swallows us all, but not yet, not tomorrow, not anytime soon, and by God not tonight. Steak!

Also, leaving your credit card behind in the folder!

And not realizing it until the next day! I was at Home Depot, picking up wood, and when I opened my wallet there was a big blank slot where the card should have been. Dum-dum- DUUUUUUMMMMM. I doubted anyone had used it, but you get that feeling that some crafty hacker had managed to use the card to transfer all your money to the Cayman Islands. So. Drove home, cancelled the cards, got the credit card. Even though I pay off the balance monthly I still feel like Mr. Fiscal Idiocy putting groceries on the credit card. Reminds me of the days when I got my first Dayton's card, and was amazed to learn I only had to pay $15 a month on the balance. Wow! That's incredible! I could, like, just pay $15 forever, and have all this neat gear! Well, now it's $45, because I bought more stuff, but still! Credit rocks!

Learned that lesson soon enough, and it's been cash & carry ever since. Except for the house. Cannot carry a house.

Errands went well, except that I had to go to three places to find the exact precise salami Natalie wants for lunch. Has to have a hint of garlic, or it is an abomination. At Cub I found the sole remaining bag of my preferred brand of coffee: Last Chicken in the Shop. Checked the ice cream for my preferred brand of dessert: Last Chicken in the Shop. Which would make two last chickens. So, different shops, then. Noted something I’d never seen before:
It's official, so you needn't worry you're getting unofficial Vikings Fudge.

Another flavor, with that Orwell touch:

*Busy day* at the office – back with updates after we're done with today's run-through of the SuperSecret Strib Project.
hpoulter says:
February 2, 2009 at 5:27 am

“last chicken in the shop”? Is this a sly reference to the expression “last turkey in the shop”? Spike Milligan used to use it on the Goon Show to make the cognoscenti snigger. It’s fairly obscene.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
February 2, 2009 at 6:40 am

Jasper has kept your homes wolverine-free for 14 years. Wheelbarrowing him down the stairs is the least you could do for him.

Of course, nothing pays back like a long scratching just above the tail.

Julia says:
February 2, 2009 at 7:31 am

You’re right and you will know when it’s Jasper’s time. And so will he. Until then, enjoy his company as you do and don’t worry about it.

brian says:
February 2, 2009 at 8:45 am

It isn’t that hard to “relieve” a dog’s gland impaction yourself if you don’t want to spend the $20 to have the vet do it. Just put your fingers at 5 o’clock and 7 o’clock, push in a little and squeeze forward. You may want to be in the bathtub when you do it though. And my dog REALLY wants to lick it up when I’m done, so be aware.

pr9000 says:
February 2, 2009 at 8:46 am

I’ve always interpreted dog yawning as a sign of nervousness.

erp says:
February 2, 2009 at 9:07 am

Classic Lileks. Thanks.

Irish Al says:
February 2, 2009 at 9:10 am

That really is a giant rutabaga.

Stephen B says:
February 2, 2009 at 9:45 am

Well done, sir. Well done! That was a Bleat worth the subscription.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 2, 2009 at 9:53 am

We lost old Barnaby in 99 at age 11. And you are right – you will note the change. We were married for 2 years when we got him, and
15 years before our Daughter was born, so he was our kid for a long time. Reluctantly got another Lab last year for the kids. He's their dog, not mine, and I doubt that there ever will be a dog that is mine in that way. In many ways, this dog is better mannered than Barnaby, more of an athlete, gentler with kids, less destructive. Just doesn't have the personality of Barnaby. Think of Barnaby as Marley from John Grogan's book (dead ringer too), but well mannered and heeded commands. Ate a couch, and put his head through a window – all in the same day. Crashed through a wall. Ran through a wooden screen door (not just the screen, but the wood framing at the bottom). Fell asleep propped up in a corner after his “procedure” to be altered. Character.

Man's best friend? I don't know. Faithful companion, definitely. Over the years, tales of Jasper have re-affirmed my connection to Barnaby, so I always see the significance he plays in your family's lives. Enjoy him for the rest of his days, since he seems to be blessed with extra-ordinary longevity. He seems to truly enjoy his time with you and yours at Jaserwood.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 2, 2009 at 10:05 am

Oh, and it helps when your close friend is one of the only certified Veterinarian emergency surgeons in the state. One phone call and she arranges to get you into the prestigious UC Davis Animal Schools' imaging facility for MRIs and Ultrasounds to determine the extent of tumors in your dog, thus avoiding invasive exploratory procedures. All arranged in 10 minutes. Knew how bad it was, how far it had spread, and how much time likely remained. All docs (human and animal) should be so compassionate.

jwm says:
February 2, 2009 at 10:11 am

Cali. Cali? I first encountered this appended apellation on my first trip east in 1991. It's awful. No one in California leaves off the last two and a half syllables. In fact, No one west of the Mississippi says, “Cali.” The outrage. The utter outrage. Imagine in the governator tried to say it. It would come out Gully, which, on the other hand, might be appropriate.

JWM

Kevin Buchanan says:
February 2, 2009 at 10:12 am

I lost my dog, Sampson, a few years back. Beautiful Australian Shepherd. Sweetest dog I've ever seen. Our family had a lot of dogs as I was growing up, but he was the only one that really felt like *my* dog. He saw me through a lot – from adolescence through turbulent teenage years into my twenties. He lived long enough to see me meet my significant other, become decently successful, move out.

I still miss him. Steph's a cat person. Her cats are fun and I like having them around... but it's still not the same. There is nothing else in the animal world that compares to a really great dog. I'm not sure if it's really possible to explain, precisely, to those who don't get it (like, say, cat folks). There's a difference between having dogs around, and having... *that* dog, know what I mean?
Don’t know where I was going with this comment, and now I’m slightly misty-eyed. In closing, just wanted to say that I love it when you write about Jasper. Makes me reconnect with Sam.

–Kevin
(“fortworthology” on Twitter – appreciated the Byrne/Eno message)

jwm says:
February 2, 2009 at 10:13 am

…Although we do say caf-li-fornya before coffee, or after drinks.

JWM

RebeccaH says:
February 2, 2009 at 10:26 am

Ah yes, the joys of dog gland expression. One of the things about having a dog that I don’t miss.

When Jasper's time comes (hopefully not for a long, long time), you can be sure we'll be grieving with you.

HT says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:11 am

Although Jasper is 14, he is obviously a healthy 14, and that counts for a lot. A few years ago, we had a similarly aged and otherwise healthy dog who was diagnosed with a particularly nasty form of cancer and given less than six months to live. We opted for a non-western treatment regimen (acupuncture and herbal/dietary treatments). She lived for almost three years, and we just lost her last December to simple old age. I can recommend a website with a good overview of the relevant information, although the doctor (who, I will note, is a DVM in addition to being a trained acupuncturist and herbalist and is thus able to do what most vets cannot, which is analyze a problem from both perspectives) is not in your area and thus you would need to find your own practitioner. Her name is Lena McCullough, and the info can be found at her eponymously named website.

Stone says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:11 am

James – my dog, Ramius, just turned 14 and I feel for you every time you write about Jasper's troubles because I see them here, too. A great dog is a good find, (got Ramius out of a laundry basket in front of a supermarket) and a best friend.

As for cash-and-carry, ain’t it grand? My wife & I paid off $99,618 in 28 months once we woke up. We pay the mortgage and the rest is ALLLLL ours!

Steve says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:12 am

In regards to the dog, I have a coworker who has given their older dogs the Glucosimine stuff and said it worked wonders on the dogs, allowing them to hop on/off couches, beds, etc with no pain.

Also Jim, since you love taking pics of old familiar signs and places, I recommend you start doing that as well with the places you love
NOW! With this coming depression, might as well have a snapshot of the places you go to as you remember them!

juanito - John Davey says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:13 am

Cali, please don’t. Cal, No Cal, Nor Cal, So Cal, all fine. California doesn’t seem harder to spit out than Minnesota. Much easier than New Hampshire! It’s the difference between San Francisco and ‘Frisco.

Gully – well, we are on our way…

Spud says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:16 am

I realize you may not be a big sports fan, but there’s a “columnist” (not sure if that’s the correct term for him) over at espn.go.com that wrote a poignant article last week about his dog passing away. His name is Bill Simmons and you’ll find him in the Page 2 section. I can’t link it because my work firewall will not let me connect to ESPN. Go figure.

becky says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:36 am

I’m stunned reading about your dog Jasper. Just last week, my 9-year-old pup Lucy suddenly had a giant bump on her butt, next to her tail. The vet said “Abscessed gland or tumor.” The next day it was “tumor, but too big to remove; wait for biopsy.” Today the news was “malignant; go see an oncologist.” The good thing (I’m hoping it’s a good sign) is that Lucy’s got no symptoms: she’s as active and bouncy and silly as normal, other than wearing a conehead to keep her from licking her stitches. I guess we’ll see what tomorrow brings. Here’s hoping we both have many more years to enjoy with our pups.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:42 am

When James wrote “Cali” I thought he was referring to a foreign city.

No, “Cali” will not do. I don’t like “Cal” too much either, it use to refer only to UC Berkeley.

“Cal” is better than “Cullifornia” or whatever, Arnold says. What is up with that, I have heard European hockey players with fewer years in North America who can pronounce English better than Arnold.

luvndbison says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:45 am

My husband is the supervisor of the ice cream department at Cass Clay (which is actually owned by Ampi.) They used to make the “official” Packers ice cream too until the cheese heads got wind that their ice cream came from Fargo. That was the end of THAT contract!
Patrick says:
February 2, 2009 at 11:47 am

I remember when we had to put our old dog Pete down back in 1999. He was one of the greatest dogs I have ever known, or will ever know. Besides Jasper. I see a lot of Pete in Jasper, especially some of his demeanor.

We had gotten Pete from my great-granddad in the Fall of 1994, and had him until Spring of 1999. My parents tried to get another dog, but nothing could compare to Pete. He always followed me or my dad anywhere we went. He loved to be around me when I went down to the swamp behind our house.

When my mom was recovering from surgery in Summer 1995, he put on his Guard Dog routine. I wasn’t at home, but she told me about how one time some Jehovah’s Witnesses or some other similar religious folk came knocking on the door. Normally he wouldn’t bark at anyone knocking on the door, but he barked at these people. They left rather abruptly.

We currently have a black Lab mix named Magic. She’s more my dad’s dog than anyone else’s. When I or my mom would try to take her for a walk, she would stop every few steps and look back, expecting to see my dad. The only time she really wants my attention is when I’m eating supper after I get home (I tend to get home rather late), and she wants a piece of whatever I’m eating. I tell her no, because I know my parents both gave her plenty of leftovers.

Glen says:
February 2, 2009 at 12:47 pm

Posted by Brian, “It isn’t that hard to “relieve” a dog's gland impaction yourself if you don’t want to spend the $20 to have the vet do it.”

This really tells me a lot about how our value systems must differ. For me: I'd happily fork over a lot more than $20 to avoid such a thing. To each his own though and more power to you.

hockeymom says:
February 2, 2009 at 12:48 pm

I agree with every one of the dog people so far – When Jasper's time is imminent, you will know. We had a 16 yr. old Malamute who went from exhibiting flashes of “puppy” to staying by herself and wanting to be left alone right at about the time that her spinal column started to fray (sort of like a shoelace losing its aglet, the vet explained). It was obvious that her quality of life was never going to recover, so we did the humane thing and helped her go. It was the right decision, but it didn't make it any easier. I hope you get to enjoy Jasper for many Springs to come!

juanito - John Davey says:
February 2, 2009 at 12:59 pm

Since we’re sharing tales of dog life, I’ll add one more insight to old Barnaby’s logic. When we lived in the city of Sacramento, he learned that he could not leave the lawn in front and touch the sidewalk. Boundaries. The same with the silly 4 foot fence that enclosed “his” yard. He could easily jump it (a 6 footer for that...
matter) but it was a boundary.

Moved to El Dorado county when he was 7 – no sidewalks. Ergo, no boundaries. Hello creek, hello turkey flock!

**Bellczar** says:
February 2, 2009 at 1:10 pm

I'm surprised you didn't mention the official Vikings ice cream comes from Fargo … the Cass-Clay Dairy, whose logo is visible on both varieties.

**Tracey** says:
February 2, 2009 at 1:43 pm

“It's not his time” — ah yes, we have a 13 yr old German Shepherd mix who tore both hind-end ACL's several years ago & has difficulty getting up off the kitchen linoleum, but it's not her time either. Walkies and pizza take her back to puppyhood again, too.

I hope we'll know when it is her time, though.

**Dora Standpipe** says:
February 2, 2009 at 1:48 pm

“Honey...do you smell dog butt?” Due to allergies, my nose does not work so well...but I could smell that. After figuring out if I wanted to tackle the deed on my own...I decided to listen to my inner voice and bring poochie to the vet. Best $15 spent.

**Lileks** says:
February 2, 2009 at 2:02 pm


**JerseyAmy** says:
February 2, 2009 at 2:10 pm

Well, today's Bleat was well worth getting on the Internet for. I can relate on so many levels. Our lab-mutt Tootsie is battling cancer. She had surgery a few months back and is going through chemotherapy. An outrageous expense? Perhaps, but she's only 7 1/2 (and we rescued her when she was 5). We just aren't ready to say goodbye to her without saying we tried to save her. And I contend that it's not cruel to put her through it, because it's in lower doses than in humans. She doesn't act sick at all – no loss of energy, appetite, or fur. And thankfully she's wonderful around the baby, and even a bit protective of him.

I have five friends I've known since grade school, and we all keep in touch to some extent, though one of them has drifted away a bit. But every few years all six of us get together, reminisce, and read The Red Notebook. One of the girls had the foresight at age 11 to keep a notebook that we would all write our thoughts in, particularly at events (class trips, sleepovers, etc). It's amazing how nearly 20 years later how many random little memories come flooding back: inside jokes from a bus ride, school crushes, pop culture references. James: if you can convince Natalie to start this with her friends, either now or in a few years, someday, when they're all off at college, she'll thank you for it.
Rev. Back It On Up 13 says:
February 2, 2009 at 3:14 pm

Ew. Dog anal gland expression is a bargain at twice the price.

So far my weiner has had no problems in that “area” but I’d rather not even try to diagnose an overflowing sac, much less drain one.

I love my weiner. But the contents of her butt are her own property and only a trained pro is going in there. This post had me smiling today, when I really needed it.

Mikey NTH says:
February 2, 2009 at 4:53 pm

Our old dog Cinder made it to eleven. Mom and dad put her down. She was in pain, and getting incontinent, but still the sweetest thing ever.

They cried. I did a bit, too.

Deana says:
February 2, 2009 at 7:11 pm

Seriously, I would pay a full time staff member just to avoid anal gland expression. And I've caught my kids' vomit in my bare hands.

Old dog people—Gene Weingarten put out a gorgeous book about old dogs, full of photos and essays. He's a really funny guy, but it would make the hardest heart soften to pudding.

jwm says:
February 2, 2009 at 7:38 pm

“The Power of the Dog”

“GARM — A HOSTAGE” — ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

There is sorrow enough in the natural way
From men and women to fill our day;
And when we are certain of sorrow in store,
Why do we always arrange for more?
Brothers and Sisters, I bid you beware
Of giving your heart to a dog to tear.

Buy a pup and your money will buy
Love unflinching that cannot lie –
Perfect passion and worship fed
By a kick in the ribs or a pat on the head.
Nevertheless it is hardly fair
To risk your heart for a dog to tear.

When the fourteen years which Nature permits
Are closing in asthma, or tumour, or fits,
And the vet's unspoken prescription runs
To lethal chambers or loaded guns,
Then you will find — it's your own affair –
But . . . you've given your heart to a dog to tear.

When the body that lived at your single will,
With its whimper of welcome, is stilled (how still!)
When the spirit hat answered your every mood
Is gone — wherever it goes — for good,
You will discover how much you care,
And will give your heart to a dog to tear.
We've sorrow enough in the natural way,
When it comes to burying Christian clay.
Our loves are not given, but only lent,
At compound interest of cent per cent.
Though it is not always the case, I believe,
That the longer we've kept 'em, the more do we grieve;

For, when debts are payable, right or wrong,
A short-time loan is as bad as a long –
So why in — Heaven (before we are there)
Should we give our hearts to a dog to tear?

Rudyard Kipling

Why, indeed? I am a cat guy, myself, and I often realize that I am altogether too fond of my cantankerous Manx, Booger the Cat. I know that one day I will lose my little buddy, and it's going to tear the heart out of me.

When we lose a loved one there is a kind of merciful numbness in the grief that shields us from taking in the full depth of the pain all at once. The realization seeps in slowly. There is no such shield against the grief when we lose a pet. Dennis Prager once remarked that the only time he saw his father weep was when the cat died. So why do we let ourselves in for it? My friend Will (also a cat guy) says that it is an act of defiance of sorts. It's a way of saying to fate, “Do your worst and be damned for it. I will love, and I will hurt, and I will not be disuaded from it.” He's going to get another cat.

JWM

teach5 says:
February 2, 2009 at 10:39 pm

Always love a Jasper pic and story. He looks hale and hearty! We just put our 12 year-old orange Maine Coon cat down on Fri. Hardest thing for any animal lover to do is to take the pet to the vet and come home without it. She was a beauty–gorgeous face, wonderful personality, and very personable. She was fine at Christmas and deteriorated steadily throughout January. Many tests determined a mystery mass near the bladder. So sad to watch. I miss her. Can't even think about getting another cat right now.

jwm says:
February 3, 2009 at 12:07 am

Get another cat, teach5. Some kitty out there deserves an owner like you.

JWM

PatchtheBun says:
February 3, 2009 at 9:04 am

I like you better now, James because you are short. I am 4'11".

Shelley says:
February 3, 2009 at 1:42 pm

I have a 22 year old cat. She walks drop hocked and sleeps a lot, but she still enjoys her food and scratches. She still plays too and has been with me for half my life. It's funny when non-pet people say –
“It was only a dog/cat/fish … Get another one.” Sometime people get close to their pets in a way they cannot with people.

Not to say that I'm a crazy cat lady or anything.

teach5 says:
February 3, 2009 at 4:12 pm

22! Wow! That's quite an accomplishment. Good for her—and you! Bet she enjoys her spot of sunshine for a good snooze.

Kev says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:17 pm

Also, leaving your credit card behind in the folder!

And not realizing it until the next day!

I once left my drivers' license at a bowling alley for almost an entire week (they take it from one person in the party to ensure, I think, that people don't leave without paying). It was a good thing that I didn't get stopped during that week...

Re losing a pet (and hoping that's not a subject for our host for a long time, I expressed it like this when I lost my cat a few years ago:

“Of all the animals that are out there, it's amazing how a select few species can come into our lives and be like family. We give them food and shelter, and whatever they give us back, whether it's love and affection or mostly indifference and occasional acknowledgement, it's always hard to let them go.”

And the indifference part referred to my grumpy old cat. I still miss the hell out of her.
THE LATEST

WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

MORE

Thanks for dropping by! Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Later today:

What caused their happiness? The answer comes later today! This isn't the official weekly Out of Context Ad Contest, but on the other hand, why not.

**UPDATE:** here you go.
Since I haven’t had a true office job for most of my life, early morning meetings require great rejiggering of the schedule. In DC I had to be in the office at nine, I think. Walked to work every day, a 30 minute hike I always enjoyed. You could put me outside my apartment, blindfold me, and I’d still make it to 2000 Penn. If only by sense of smell. Hmm: old beer and fresh urine, that would be Adams Morgan. The neighborhood got better as I went on, which always meant it got worse as I approached home at the end of the day. And this was still considered a desirable neighborhood. My first day in Adams Morgan I ate at a Cajun joint and saw a rat run across the floor. On one of my first bright-eyed jaunts down the road to the office, I encountered a drunk so incapacitated at 8 AM he could not bring himself to stagger to an alley to relieve himself, but had enough residual humanity to realize he should not soak the drawers – so he unfurled the mast and let loose an arc which, I recall, caught the sun, and sparkled.

Anyway. Most mornings begin the same – get Natalie off to the bus, bid goodbye to wife, head upstairs and start to work. Monday morning required off-site work, and it began much earlier than I’m used to. So I set four alarms, had a hard time getting to sleep, then woke up too early out of fear I’d missed the alarms. Left the house without even speaking to my daughter; don’t like that at all. No sir.

If I could tell you what the super-secret project was, I would, but I can’t, so – it was . . . fun. Did I mention my new Mafia name is Jimmy Two-Cubes? I moved my desk elsewhere in the newsroom, and believe me, we have options nowadays. You want an empty desk, there’s a fighting chance you’ll find one.

It’s not an official move, since that requires forms and requests and expenditures and e-mail alerts about your MOVE DATE and the ceremonial handing over of the keys, et cetera. My old desk was fine, but it’s located at the absolute end of the building, a long hike from everywhere I need to be. So I moved. Picked up my nameplate and few pieces of desk flair, piggybacked on an ethernet cable for my laptop, and set up shop where I need to be. No one minds.

It’s the upside of downsizing, perhaps – what would have thrown a box of rebars into the swiss-clock-mechanism of a master plan six years ago is now unnoticed. Six years ago moving everyone around was an inevitable result of the latest reorg, and it could be traumatic; you were separated from friends, from your routine, from your space. I used to have a grand desk right in the center of the newsroom, surrounded by boon comrades of different temperaments – the TV reporter, the wry copy editor, the phlegmatic copy editor, and few other souls who came and went in cubicles that might as well have said FNG overhead in red letters. With every subsequent move I cared less about my desk, and hung fewer things on the cloth-covered real-pen walls. Now it’s a “Talk of the Town” fruit crate label and a bumpersticker from the WaPo Style Invitational that says “How’s My Drivel?”

When I got my first job in a real office, great care was spent on every inch; every postcard and picture was carefully chosen to personalize the space. But
we had no internet then. Now the only thing that counts is the familiarity of the browser bookmarks. That's my environment, and it's perfectly portable.

I remember again that I spent untold wasted hours in the DC bureau, looking at the computer. Before the internet. I repeat: I spent hours looking at the computer before the internet. In retrospect it's like we were staring at a phone, waiting for it to ring.

Later today: comic covers, B&W World, and the ad that accompanies the picture above. Buzz.mn is up with a time-warping question, as well, and it's Small Town Website of the Week at buzz around noon.

So! Off we go, then.

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**46 RESPONSES TO tuesday, feb. 3**

**Mario** says:
February 3, 2009 at 1:13 am

I was going to guess some sort of mouthwash, then I accidentally hovered over the picture. Could be a fake-out, though. If so, it is a very clever one.

**Steve Ripley** says:
February 3, 2009 at 1:51 am

I'm saying either a laxative or a deodorant.

**GardenStater** says:
February 3, 2009 at 4:59 am

I'm not sure, but my guess is that it's an ad for Listerine.

**Patrick** says:
February 3, 2009 at 5:02 am

I'm thinking it's an ad for Listerine, Lifebuoy, or Rinso.

**PersonFromPorlock** says:
February 3, 2009 at 5:42 am

You just... moved? Egad, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world!

**Mr_Lilacs** says:
February 3, 2009 at 6:29 am

Patrick's answer makes quite a bit of sense, so we should probably look in another direction. Piney-fresh mothballs perhaps. Maybe Chesterfields.
Tolockadoor says:
February 3, 2009 at 7:01 am

Oh, 2000 Penn, how I miss Kinkead’s.

But more importantly, how I miss the Red Lion…

Stoutcat says:
February 3, 2009 at 7:28 am

Nope, clearly it’s a cleverly-aged ad for just after last month’s Inaugural—“See? We’ve elected Obama! You like us now, right? And we like each other better, too.”

Mike H says:
February 3, 2009 at 7:35 am

Preperation H, cause rhoids have never ever been popular!!

Gibbering Madness says:
February 3, 2009 at 7:37 am

They’re happy because they eat Lard.

Pilgrim says:
February 3, 2009 at 8:08 am

Since you lead a portable life, what do you use to make your life’s bookmarks available wherever you go?

Tom says:
February 3, 2009 at 8:30 am

I’m not sure what they’re selling, but that man has borrowed Danny Thomas’s nose.

Deana says:
February 3, 2009 at 8:47 am

Colgate.

A Style Invitational Bumpersticker! Lucky bastard. Did you “earn” it or just nick it from Weingarten during the Post days? I did so enjoy your columns from my group house (as opposed to group home) on the wrong side of Takoma park.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 3, 2009 at 8:55 am

The Agency I work for went from a cramped building with over 60 folks, to to new ownership, to acquiring another large Agency in a vastly larger building, to being insolvent, to being a web based Agency with less than 10 staff. In the past, desk moves were fraught with emotional distress, and the needy crying out for absolution (just get me to suite 6 on the second floor, and I will be saved!). Now, with less than 10 in a building setup for a call center of 30, an accounting department, a sales floor, and admin space, you can just work where ever the h*ll you want. I telecommute quite a bit, so I get to be everywhere. It’s quite liberating, but feels a bit weird!
Lindsay Korst says:
February 3, 2009 at 8:56 am

Jimmy “Two Cubes” Lileks... Did you write this blog... IN the cube? Have you written ANY of your recent blogs in this CUBE of yours...

rbj says:
February 3, 2009 at 8:56 am

It's an ad for “Scandal in a Box” by which they were able to get rid of that annoying Johnston couple, who had shamelessly wedged their way into Mr. & Mrs. Bignose's circle of friends and monopolizing the limelight while the Bignoses were left on the sidelines as an afterthought. But a few nondescript photo indistinct photos and a couple of strategically placed unmentionables and suddenly the Johnstons are thought of as one of those couples and never invited back to polite company.

Scandal in a Box. For when you absolutely need to rid yourselves of some others, but don't want to hire a hitman.

Frank says:
February 3, 2009 at 9:04 am

The ad picture file is denture2.jpg. Could be a clue...

RebeccaH says:
February 3, 2009 at 9:08 am

In my varied career, I've had to help move not just desks, but entire offices from one building to another five times. I love retirement.

Jeff says:
February 3, 2009 at 9:08 am

I'm thinking it's Arthur Murray Dance Studios. They had a location in a local strip mall back in the early '60s, and painted yellow footprints along the sidewalk from the parking lot to their door.

The Pied Piper had nothing on those yellow footprints: every kid would spot them and run over to lope down the path with not the first notion (or care) where it went. The calls from annoyed parents echoed down the brick hallway — “Johnnnnneeee! Come back here right now, we're going to the bank and Loblaws, and don't have time for faffing about!”

And of course it would have to be Loblaws, not the Grand Union at the other end of the strip. Grand Union had the lobster tank where incautious boys got their fingers nipped. Loblaws just smelled like grumpy old people. Grumpy old people who didn't know how to dance and probably didn't care.

Oh, rats... now I'm feeling grumpy and old. Thanks a bunch!

Lileks says:
February 3, 2009 at 9:13 am

I think Gene gave it to me; he's a generous man.
Lileks says:
February 3, 2009 at 9:13 am

I use mac.com, or rather me.com, to sync all the bookmarks, mail, contacts, etc. Works like a charm so far.

Lars Walker says:
February 3, 2009 at 9:21 am

They named names to the Kefauver Commission.

swschrad says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:14 am

one ESCAPED? you ate at a Cajun place and a rat escaped? there went the night's profits 😊

Al Federber says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:33 am

Is it an ad for a swinger's club?

Mxymaster says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:35 am

Yes, friends, why not try Alcohol™? Alcohol™ can help make you popular, and help you endure the company of others. Nine out of ten bartenders recommend Alcohol™ to their customers. Alcohol™ may not solve your problems, but it makes them feel solved. So pick up some Alcohol™ today!

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:39 am

Your right swschrad, that rodent was for the local cajun variation of “Salmis de rats à la Robert” made popular during the Seige of Paris (1870 to 1871).

“run Remy, run!”

Steven says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:39 am

“On one of my first bright-eyed jaunts down the road to the office, I encountered a drunk so incapacitated at 8 AM he could not bring himself to stagger to an alley to relieve himself, but had enough residual humanity to realize he should not soak the drawers – so he unfurled the mast and let loose an arc which, I recall, caught the sun, and sparkled.”

Did you say anything to Senator Kennedy when he was done?

Rightfromthestart says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:43 am

In a classic Dilbert cartoon he asks his boss if the constant cubicle moves are all the result of some management power game. In the last frame, as he's moving in, he says to Wally ‘New dress code’ and you see him dressed as a pawn suit. Hilarious if you've ever worked
in an office.

swschrad says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:46 am

WHICH Senator Kennedy?

LRigetto says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:48 am

“Is it an ad for a swinger's club?”

Close. It's an ad for penicillin; now that they've gotten rid of the clap they can get back into the swinger's club.

Patrick says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:50 am

After Frank's comment about the file name, I'm going to have to take another guess and say either Polident or Pepsodent. I wonder where the yellow went.

Speaking of moving, there had been off and on rumors in the mill that my company was moving. They had decided it was best not to. I wish they did. This bad economy has taken its toll on us in other ways besides monetarily. We are located in an office complex, and share parking spaces with four other businesses, three of which are government departments: DMV, Department of Family & Children Services (DFCS, pronounced “Defax” around here), a printing company, and Department of Labor. That last one is the reason why we can't find parking spaces unless we come in before 4 AM, or just stay the night, and in some cases end up double-parking or parking behind someone else, and if the person who is blocked in needs to get out, they have to call the other person blocking them in and ask them to move their $@* car.

jeischen says:
February 3, 2009 at 10:55 am

Jeez, that lady in the photo doesn't just have a gap between her front teeth, she has gaps between all her teeth. It's like she made her own dentures from gravel in the driveway.

Andrew says:
February 3, 2009 at 12:09 pm

FNG? Would someone care to explain? I've worked in an office and am daft about such matters.

Gibbering Madness says:
February 3, 2009 at 12:10 pm

Jimmy “Two Cubes” Lileks... Did you write this blog... IN the cube? Have you written ANY of your recent blogs in this CUBE of yours...

We commentators are more than a match for the likes of you, “Two Cubes”. Get your own Arts programme!
mpcdsp says:
February 3, 2009 at 12:29 pm

Gibbering Madness — you're confusing Jimmy with Arthur “Two Sheds” Jackson.
I'm hoping today's ad isn't for Ex-Lax.

Warren says:
February 3, 2009 at 12:44 pm

*When I got my first job in a real office, great care was spent on every inch; every postcard and picture was carefully chosen to personalize the space. But we had no internet then. Now the only thing that counts is the familiarity of the browser bookmarks. That's my environment, and it's perfectly portable.*

This is a lovely thing. I'm so tired of the moaning and wailing I encounter about how soulless, cold and impersonal the interwebs are. It's refreshing and nice to see someone pointing out one of the chief strengths — portability.

Anyone who believes a computer is impersonal has probably never really used one, and is likely stuck on Win besides.

Seattle_Dave says:
February 3, 2009 at 12:44 pm

I don't like the Browns anymore because they don't punctuate their dialogue.

Pilgrim says:
February 3, 2009 at 1:17 pm

James, thanks for the info on “me.com”.
Looking forward to more screedblogs, and still waiting for the complete “Joe Ohio” story (waiting for Godot was easier!)

Lileks says:
February 3, 2009 at 1:26 pm


Shelley says:
February 3, 2009 at 1:32 pm

I've seen ads like that one and I think it's Listerine, but of course I'm too late as someone above got to it first. It's like the Movie top 10s on the Hugh Hewitt show. By the time I get through, my movie has been mentioned.

mousepotato says:
February 3, 2009 at 1:33 pm

The guy looks like Monty Hall from Let's Make a Deal fame. They are popular again because he has finally quit the wheeling and dealing business. They like each other better now, because of what they found behind door number 3.
GardenStater says:
February 3, 2009 at 2:07 pm

Joe Ohio? I think he's been busy working on Buzz 2.0. We won't be seeing either of them for quite some time, I suspect.

Lars Walker says:
February 3, 2009 at 2:21 pm

For the record, I've been waiting for more Joe Ohio too.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
February 3, 2009 at 4:05 pm

Creepy! I don't think I have ever seen anyone age this fact before outside of Star Trek. What was the ad agency thinking?

You realize that the Lady in the comic will never need the product. At the rate she is aging, by the time she gets home the only products she will be interested in using will be coffins and her favorite flavour of embalming fluid (formic aldehyde or acetaldehyde.)

Wramblin' Wreck

GardenStater says:
February 3, 2009 at 8:09 pm

Food for thought–how many people have full dentures anymore? Thank God for modern dentistry....

Ross says:
February 4, 2009 at 2:27 am

Speaking of “staggering to an alley to relieve himself”, I recall a friend who, when he lived in Chicago, happened one night while walking downtown, to glance into an alley when some old guy, fairly well dressed, “unfurled”; my friend actually did what we used to call “the grand take” (or “Le Cleese”) & stopped, staring in shock as he realized it was Harry Carey, so liquored up he was burning with a low blue flame. Before my friend could turn away in embarrassment (for both of them, since Carey seemed to mind not a whit), Carey smiled, stretched out one arm to do the drunk’s one-point landing into a lean against the far wall & croaked, “Batter up!”
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]
We had an extra minute on the way to the bus this morning. Maybe a spare 45 seconds. Instead of sliding down the sidewalk waving our arms shouting WAIT we examined the quality of the ice, and found it perfect for heel-smiting. The recent thaw undermined the foundation of the ice, and left those shelves that can be sundered with a blow from your shoe. It's so very satisfying. It's revenge. It's best when you can separate a great sheet with a single strike, then crack the remainder into hapless shards. Divide and conquer. It's a pleasure available to young and old alike, although the old should leave the field if there are young ones around.

There weren't any kids around when I went to pick her up hours later, so I did a few sheets myself. There were two parked cars with Moms waiting to get their kids; if they were watching, fine, but I wondered if they thought I was doing something useful. Something related to maintenance. *Hmm, this sidewalk's out of alignment. Better kick it down.*

I mean, that man can't just be cracking ice for the pleasure of it.
Based on the twitter replies, I'm not the only parent who didn't help his daughter earn the elephant. This is not a catch phrase or euphemism, although perhaps it should be. If you sold enough Girl Scout cookies, you got an elephant. If you did not, and did not want to go to Dad's office because it's kinda embarrassing, and left it to your father who really, really doesn't like pushing the cookies on other people – who've already been hit sixteen times - then no, you're not going to earn the elephant. You want to earn the elephant, you work for it.

All evidence in the world to the (*$%(#$ contrary, but that's another day.

I did buy some cookies “on behalf” of others, but I'm not going to tell her that. Not for ten years, anyway. Save that one.

Ordinary day: worked at home and was not struck with the miserable isolation I had last Tuesday. Don't know where that came from. Perhaps it's because I just worked more; nothing makes you feel better than typing a lot, regardless of the actual product. (See also, “The Shining.”) As with last Tuesday, I ended up sitting on the floor of the hall in the church basement eating pizza off a stiff paper plate, daubing the pools of grease in the pepperoni. (Some pepperoni know enough to lay down and die when they're cooked; others turn into tiny bowls full of savory oil.) When I was finished with my piece my daughter asked for a quarter to get a Tootsie Pop, as per the ritual laid down since time began; then she ran off to play before choir and the burdens of piety were laid upon her.

When I stood to throw away my paper plate a kid down the hall waved at me; I thought it was the son of one of the Moms I know, so I waved back, even though it seemed odd he would be waving. I turned around to see if he was waving at someone else, and saw two men – one white, one black – both lowering their arms. I looked back at the kid; he was gone. I looked back at the men; the white guy was on the phone, and the black guy said “How you doing?” I turned around again to see if he was talking to someone else, but he was talking to me. At this point I had no idea who the kid belonged to. If anyone.

So we chatted for a while, discussing the cold. We were both weary of it – not today, or yesterday, but its cumulative effect on the psyche. “And yet we stay,” I said. “Why is that,” he said, not really asking; no need. Roots, tradition, familiarity, inertia, kids, the inevitable glories of spring, the high cost of packing peanuts, and so on.

He had a cup of coffee. I asked him where he got it; he hiked a thumb back towards the main kitchen. I said I usually checked upstairs in the lounge, but there wasn’t any.

“There's always coffee,” he said. “Twenty-four seven.”

Mind you, I've been spending Tuesdays in the church basement for half a decade. I've never so much as caught the faint whiff of Lutheran coffee, and I've seen everyone who comes and goes on a Tuesday night. Never seen this
fellow. I may never see him again.

He was the Coffee Angel.

We need as many of those, but we also need Gabriel with a flaming sword; a few weeks ago, a man appeared outside the church's pre-school and tried to lure some kids with a stuffed animal. He ran off when confronted, and witnesses said he was intoxicated. It's a pity he wasn't chased into traffic and converted to jam by the flat end of a public bus with the end of a Louisville Slugger hanging out the end of his digestive tract.

We had another perv sighted a few months ago doing the lean-and-lure from his car, and if I'd been on the spot and had access to Reaper drones, I would have put a missile through his windshield.

On the bright side, Eight O'Clock coffee was judged superior to Starbucks in a blind taste test. HAHAAHAHAHHAAHAAAH. Ahem. Sorry. I don't know how this is possible, because Eight O'Clock doesn't have a philosophy or a worldview or a music label or even a FARGIN' ETHOS. It's just coffee. But apparently better coffee millionaires not only can't have, they can't sell.

This can stayed in my cupboard for a long time; I'd bought it in early '01 in case guests wanted decaf. Could not bear to part with it.

Still can't.

Today: Out of Context Ad Contest; Mpls Update, and Miscreant Roundup over at buzz.mn. See you soon!
Girl Scout cookies! Thin mints, shortbread, uhhh…. I’d be happy to buy a couple of boxes next year, as long as you’re willing to ship them overseas. 😊

I used to love the Chock Full o’ Nuts commercials as a kid. Good to see the brand lives on.

_GardenStater_ says:
February 4, 2009 at 5:08 am

Eight O’Clock is my brand. And I understand why you’d want to hold on to that can, James. Here in Northern NJ, just outside Manhattan, we still see a few company logos that feature the Twin Towers.

_GardenStater_ says:
February 4, 2009 at 5:09 am

And is that Tom Ewell on the Chase and Sanborn ad? Sure looks like him.

_jetmore_ says:
February 4, 2009 at 5:33 am

Eight O’Clock is our house brand, too. It's not just the taste—it's also the typeface.

Greg Zywicki says:
February 4, 2009 at 5:51 am

Good call on the Elephant. I always resented that Dad wouldn’t take the fundraising flyer to work like other kids’ parents. Now I know why; another one of those “Dad was right,” moments.

_ecb_ says:
February 4, 2009 at 5:51 am

I may have misunderstood, but Eight O’Clock coffee is the A&P brand is it not? No connection to Chock Full of Nuts that I know of. One of my memories about Eight O’Clock coffee is going to the A&P with my mother in the early 1960s and being amazed at the in-store coffee grinders you could use to grind the Eight O’Clock coffee. My family bought all its coffee in cans and I was fascinated by the realization that this stuff actually came from beans!

_ladyjaye75_ says:
February 4, 2009 at 6:19 am

I hate Starbucks coffee! I prefer the ethical coffee that I buy, the taste is just miles above Starbucks. Yes, I admit it, I’m a coffee snob.

_Patrick_ says:
February 4, 2009 at 7:17 am

I don’t drink coffee that much, but I’ve found Starbucks to be OK…a bit pricey IMHO.

I have found the best coffee for the price to be the coffee found at almost any QuikTrip gas station. I’d always mix the two or three different flavors of cappuccino, add a shot or two of coffee, and a
shot or two of half and half. That mixture would keep me awake for a good 12 hours.

Although I hear a certain restaurant in a certain small town has the best damn coffee ever. I hear of one guy who is a landlord for a trailer park brews the 48-hour blend of Good Morning America.

Tobin says:
February 4, 2009 at 7:42 am

My brother shipped us a couple boxes of thin mints last cookie season. That seriously was one of the best things anyone has done for us since we moved overseas in 2005.

Mike H says:
February 4, 2009 at 7:53 am

Dunkin Donuts coffee is my choice, will take that over Starbucks anyday, for several reasons. One the nearest Starbucks facility is in Augusta 45 miles away. Two, they seem to have that big of a snootiness quality to them (maybe they don't but that's just me) Three it is overpriced. And four, I just like the flavor of it better.

Nothing to do with my opinion but Dunkin advertises that in a survey, more people liked Dunkin over Starbucks. Where this was done, don't know where or when. Oh well..

elin edwards says:
February 4, 2009 at 7:56 am

one of the wonderful signs of the possibility of spring in minnesota: breaking ice, especially ice on puddles, especially ice on puddles that have a wee bit of puddle left under the ice.

the sound (a squeeky sort of crackiness) is also a particular joy.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 4, 2009 at 8:44 am


Pervs are everywhere. On Monday one tried to do the “conversation lure” from a moving car as a thirteen yr old walked to school. He ended up getting out and chasing her. There's reports that a similar car and driver were seen attempting the same thing recently in another part of our rural area. If I were to ever encounter said fellow, assault & battery would be my calling card. Cry Havoc! I'm grateful I get to drop off my oldest at school daily, and next year will be able to do the same for our new kindergartner. I can't even see the day when I'll be able to let them walk up the street for a play date, let alone walk to school. My how times have changed...

Frank says:
February 4, 2009 at 8:44 am

Well, if you change your mind on the cookie thing, instead of the office, you could post a GS cookie order form here on The Bleat instead of at work. Wonder how many elephants that would add up to.
His Name is Javanus « Ennuipundit says:
February 4, 2009 at 8:54 am

[...] Name is Javanus Mr. Lileks meets a divine [...] 

juanito - John Davey says:
February 4, 2009 at 9:05 am

Well, if you change your mind on the cookie thing, instead of the office, you could post a GS cookie order form here on The Bleat instead of at work. Wonder how many elephants that would add up to.

Posted by Frank on February 4th, 2009."

The shipping would kill.

I am fortunate that I have 6 siblings (and their families, or is that a downline?) that are obligated – obligated (like the mafia) to buy GS cookies from our Brownie. However, next year when our four yr old can join the Daisies, her sales totals will be effectively cut in half. She might want to look at imposing tariffs on her little sister's cookie sales...

Joe The Painter says:
February 4, 2009 at 9:49 am

Re: Your ice capades–Your sidewalk may well be out of alignment come this Spring. This has been a nasty cold winter, the frost digging deep. What that means is that when that frost works its way back up it'll likely be taking a lot of sidewalk and asphalt with it–Considering the intensity of the cold, and the sudden lack of funds for road and infrastructure maintenance (until that 3% of Obama's stimulus leaches it's way into the legislature's pock-er, I mean coffers) will mean some nasty travel in the lakey-state...

tomindenver says:
February 4, 2009 at 9:49 am

Serving your guests 8 year old decaf?

Covvie says:
February 4, 2009 at 9:59 am

The best ice is the really thin stuff where there had been a bubble or air pocket. It's whiter than the other stuff composing the frozen puddle on the sidewalk. It has a particular “krink” sound to it just like very thin glass being smashed.

I thought I was the only one who liked digging my heel into ice shelves. I now feel accepted, and I'm on my way now to self-actualization. Thanks.

ak13820 says:
February 4, 2009 at 10:00 am

Ah, heel-smiting. What a pleasure that was as a kid. Next up, puddle-stomping.

In my office, no one has to force the GS cookie issue. Starting in January, people are demanding to know when Known GS Dad is going to bring the order form in. He just puts the form in the kitchen
and lets it fill up.

RebeccaH says:
February 4, 2009 at 10:09 am

I know exactly what you mean about the heel-smiting of ice. I've been doing that on my sidewalk, driveway, and deck for two days now. That crap is tenacious.

As for the pervs, I thought my days of fearing them were over until my kids had kids. I'm in favor of conviction and execution, myself, though some would think that extreme. At the very least they deserve life imprisonment in a very small, very dark room.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 4, 2009 at 10:16 am

We have a rule at work against selling stuff like cookies for the reason that it could seem intimidating as an extortion lite. However, it still happens.

No wonder some people are afraid of an armed population, one guy makes the mistake of asking a kid for directions and blammo.

Kidding, I am the same way, however, I hope if the situation ever arises that I have the gift of infallible intuition. Oh, what the heck, better safe than sorry 😂

Locomotive Breath says:
February 4, 2009 at 10:22 am

What are you going to do when Gnat is old enough to get on the intertubes all by herself and realizes that she has the world's most blogged about childhood?

swschrad says:
February 4, 2009 at 10:47 am

I think the Gosselins probably have that title of most-blogged kids.

quick note about perverts outside church… very quick. “Smite them, wherever ye find them.”

you don’t like it, get professional help. preferably in another state.

St. Chris says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:16 am

1. A jocular head whooshes out when you pop open a can of Chase & Sanborn?

2. Er…do any of Natalie's classmates read the Bleat?

mombalabamba says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:25 am

One year my girls and I actually went door to door to sell cookies. The neighbors were so grateful...."no one does this any more!" “I don’t know anyone selling cookies at my office” etc. She sold far more cookies than ever before, but the delivery was no fun at all. Bags full of GS cookies are heavy!
Jim says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:30 am

I'm a coffee snob, but like 8 O'Clock Beans – not bitter, rich enough if used in large doses. Starbucks is like Bud – the lowest common denominator of expensive coffee – it'll do, but that's about it. Plus their espresso is horrorshow. Caribou is better if you're doing a chain coffee shop. If I need espresso beans or a really good shot I hit one of the better local coffee shops – the taste is noticeably better, and the beans generally fresh roasted.

Alec says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:45 am

Not that it's all I drink, but Peace Coffee fair trade coffee from right here in the Twin Cities is really good.

ajtooley says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:49 am

Good job on the elephant thing. My son sold scout popcorn for the first time this year, and got no unwarranted help. The great thing is he didn't need it and didn't want it, so we must be doing something right. And The Missus and I are sticklers where others' sales efforts are concerned as well; if the child comes to us to sell something, we'll almost certainly buy –but if it's the parent doing the pitching, no deal.

jeischen says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:50 am

Ice smiting – great in cowboys boots; potential heel spurs in Converse.

DensityDuck says:
February 4, 2009 at 11:56 am

Cookies: This year we had a bit of GSC-related drama. My group has been moved off-campus to a spare building. One of the secretaries went around back at the start of GSC Time, putting up GSC fliers for some guy who sits in a building eight miles away. Someone apparently thought this was severely uncool and tore them all down. Next day they were back up. And back down. Third time up; third time down. Arguments in the break room wafting out over the cube farm like depressing whiffs of methane in a closed area. Finally, a new flier: THIS AREA NOT INTENDED FOR PERSONAL FLIERS AND POSTINGS.

******

Moms waiting in cars. What's up with that? That seems to be the new thing, is “stay in your car whenever it's at all possible”. At the gas station WHILE PUMPING GAS. Back in Pennsylvania I saw something that topped it all; the bus stopped at the driveway to the house, and the mom would DRIVE HER CAR TO THE END OF THE DRIVEWAY to drop-off or pick-up.

Amanda Albright Flynn says:
February 4, 2009 at 12:51 pm
Good that protective dads burn at the idea of a perv—that's the start of what a daughter needs. From there, she needs to learn how to deal with it herself and yes, she will have to deal with it. She needs to run away. She needs to tell someone and realize that an adult should not ask a kid to help her look for his lost dog. She needs to learn a determined walk that says she is going somewhere that people will miss her if she doesn't arrive.

I don't believe times have gotten worse. I believe we've just grown up and become parents rather than the kids.

**MMW says:**
February 4, 2009 at 1:27 pm

Not to take anything away from 8 o'clock coffee (which was my favorite store before I started roasting my own), but beating Starbucks in a taste test is a little like beating a one legged man in a butt kicking competition.

**Cuneo says:**
February 4, 2009 at 1:41 pm

We went through the gsc thing about ten years ago. I work in a very large educational institution, and the building was then zoned into three different “sales territories” (no poaching out your zone). I never felt bad about bringing cookie forms into the office, the cookies sold themselves. People also set up outside the supermarkets and wal/k marts. I don't remember an elephant, I think it was a frog at the time.

**Linda says:**
February 4, 2009 at 2:53 pm

Ice cracking is such a stress reliever!

Dunn Bros. Sumatra beans ground at home. I am an unrepentant coffee snob too.

We're better parents about pervs only because most of us knew someone who was affected by a perv. I don't know about you, but my parents had no idea where I was or who I was with during and after school or on weekends.

GSC sales never used to bother me but:
The uber-mom here at work emailed the entire company excluding HR and Sales about upcoming GSC sales. Then she posted the sign-up sheet on the outside of MY cube wall. Quite a few people asked me why my son was selling GSC. Finally I posted a note saying, “See Uber-mom for information about cookies”. The notice was moved to a different location the next day, with my note still attached. I am so sick of adults shilling for their kids. If my son has a fundraiser, he has to raise the funds. I’m only transportation.

**Chas C-Q says:**
February 4, 2009 at 5:27 pm

I wonder how many more cookies GSA could sell if they had an option for buying cookies from an individual scout, to be gifted elsewhere. Say, to an APO or FPO address?
Shaky Barnes says:
February 4, 2009 at 9:28 pm

I would be shocked to hear Starbucks didn’t lose some taste test. Starbucks is all about candified espresso drinks for ignorant yuppies and has never, in fact, been known for having good actual, brewed coffee. It is in fact perhaps the single worst coffee available on the market, including the cheapest off-brands at discount overstock stores that don’t even label their cans “100% coffee”.

Actually their new “Peak’s Roast” (or whatever) is infinitely better than that truly offensive foul swill they use to sell to dupes until a few months ago, but it’s still not very good.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 4, 2009 at 10:52 pm

I wonder how many more cookies GSA could sell if they had an option for buying cookies from an individual scout, to be gifted elsewhere. Say, to an APO or FPO address?

Posted by Chas C-Q on February 4th, 2009.

That would be slick. I would buy even more so that I could send them to some adopted units!

coffee drinker says:
February 8, 2009 at 9:39 pm

I’m surprised Eight O’Clock coffee did so well in that taste test… I’ve found that their coffee leaves a sour after-taste in my mouth.
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

MORE
Thanks for dropping by! Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Report cards came home today. Natalie did not get 4s in reading, because she's not in Advanced Placement. She's not in Advanced Placement because she's . . . not, I guess. Doesn't matter that she reads exceptionally well; a Decision Was Made, so there's no four, and won't be. Unless I misunderstand the grading system, that is. I'd like to think kids who aren't in AP could still get an A. Wouldn't you think?

I'm also curious how one gets a 4 in “technology,” because it's apparent they're testing for things other than “use a stylus to swap custom brushes for the defaults, then save the frame as a JPEG with medium compression, then import it into iMovie and duplicate the sequence ten times to sync the mouth movements with a song imported from iTunes, then export as a movie.”

Parent-teacher conferences coming up. I have some questions.

Nothing worse than sitting in a news huddle, listening to tomorrow's stories, and realizing that someone else beat you to your column topic. So, this will be short – although I expect today will have three Lance Lawsons and a
Curious Lucre update, so it's not a total waste.

As I mentioned earlier on Twitter, I could not get the theme from “Vertigo” out of my head all morning, and that bodes ill for a cheerful day. I managed to dislodge it with something more cheerful and optimistic – “DOA,” by Bloodrock – but it still took a while to shake. I'm not one of those who thinks “Vertigo” is Hitchcock's masterpiece, just because it's “personal” and “tormented” – it's almost a dishonorable movie, and it can't even manage to be the supernatural thriller it pretends it's going to be. But the music just pulls your heart out. Loss and longing and emptiness – and when it's used for the most emotional moment of the entire movie, which also happens to be the most unsettlingly sad and perverse, it turns into fulfillment and completeness without changing a note.

The things most people don’t like are the things I enjoy, such as endless shots of driving around San Francisco in the late 1950s. Those cars, those colors, those signs. This shot of Jimmy Stewart's apartment caught my eye:

Let's zoom in on the coffee table:

Swank! You naughty lad. To be fair, it wasn’t like the later extra-naughty Swank; it began as an Esquire-type mag, had a run as a girlie rag in the early 50s, then remade itself as a general-interest men's magazine with legit authors. In 1958, the year of Vertigo, the magazine was edited by a young
fellow named Bruce Jay Friedman – who would later write short stories, books, and movie scripts. (Like “Splash.”) He’s the father of the excellent illustrator Drew Friedman, whose work you’ve seen for years. He was born the year this movie was released, and his dad is still around.

Anyway: I like “Rear Window” above all others, and look forward to the annual viewing this summer when the weather’s hot and I can open the window. “North by Northwest” is fun like no other Hitch pic, probably because it has the bounce of its star. I was looking at the opening credits tonight, and watched the opening sequence of Cary Grant and his secretary on the streets of New York.

Hello: She walks in front of Cary Grant, out of the frame, and into complete and undeserved obscurity. No mention of her on the credits at imdb, unless she’s “Woman” – which she certainly was – in which case she’s Anne Anderson, wife of Bert Convy.

Makes me wonder what the movies would have been like if Hitchcock had been obsessed with redheads.

Incidentally, I was kidding about “DOA” by Bloodrock, a wretched piece of snuff-pop that oozed out of radios in the early 70s. We thought it was so cool, because it’s about a guy who was in a horrible accident, and he dies. Wicked!
I REMEM-BER! the signal-changing stick / went though my left nostril / I REMEM-BER! the AM radio knob / flew through my good friend Rob and so on.

This might be why my interest in pop culture tends to diminish around early-mid November 1963, and doesn't pick up again until the early-mid 80s.

–

Lance is up at http://buzz.mn – head over, and good luck. See you soon.

55 RESPONSES TO thursday, feb. 05

Mike Gebert says:
February 6, 2009 at 7:14 am

Vertigo isn't my favorite either, but I'll tell you, watching it on an HD channel a while back was pretty stunning. Great to just soak in the details of everyday life...

…and the other day MGM HD showed Sabotage, from 1936, in a stunningly clear and detailed HD version. Forget the story, the location shooting in London is breathtaking, knowing you're practically walking around where the bombs of the Blitz would fall soon enough. I spent the whole movie just looking at magazine covers (Homolka at one point is reading a Sunday color supplement article about the Bela Lugosi movie White Zombie– how cool is that?)

rivlax says:
February 6, 2009 at 8:03 am

Fascinating then-and-now Web site. Thanks for the link, Andre.

Regarding “The Man Who Knew Too Much,” my wife and I laugh every time we think of Doris Day screaming “Que sera, sera” so her kidnapped son can hear her. Unintentionally funny scene.

Liberty Girl says:
February 6, 2009 at 9:57 am

Does anyone else remember Bert Convy hosting a game show (Match Game?), and had something like a near-100% success rate in predicting the sex of the babies of his pregnant contestants. It's a crime that was totally left out of his obit.

PatchtheBun says:
February 6, 2009 at 6:44 pm

James isn't one of *those* parents.

I had one a few years ago. I had an informal grading system with my youngest music students. Red star=bad, then green, blue, silver and Gold star= great. One of my 5 year old kids played a song really badly, then admitted she hadn't practiced and said she deserved a red star. I agreed, and we talked about what she could do to
improve. She wasn’t traumatized, just very honest and disappointed that she hadn’t worked harder. Later on my boss got a call from the mom who said she was furious that I would give a child a failing grade. “No child should receive a failing grade.”

The next lesson, my student came in and did a fantastic job. She was ecstatic, and she got a gold star. Better yet, she knew that she truly deserved the gold star.

Gina says:
February 6, 2009 at 10:35 pm

Pilgrim, re: the moment of “fulfillment”: I’m guessing it would be when Judy steps out of the bathroom having turned herself into Madeleine, and she and Scotty go into their extended liplock.

I also like “Rear Window” better, but “Vertigo” is nonetheless a great, great movie.
reading this? Really?
I stepped outside at 9:38 PM Thursday night to have a small cigar, and saw a UFO.

I should make my position clear: I've always believed in the possibility of UFOs, but I've never believed in anyone who believed in UFOs. I've never seen anything that constituted anything close to proof, and never been dissuaded that there isn't something out there. On the other hand, you can hem and haw and qualify all you like – in the end you know where you stand. If someone showed up tomorrow and shouted ATHEISTS, TO THE LEFT! DEISTS AND ABOVE, TO THE RIGHT! you know where you'd go. (If he had a gun, or a court order, that is.) Likewise the question of life on other planets. I don't think we're alone, but it's one of those items you file under Unknowable Things That Are Irrelevant Until They're Not.

Life elsewhere is one issue; life that gets off the rock and goes elsewhere is another. One of the snarky objections that annoys me: Why would they care about us? Lowly smelly violent apes. I don't know. Maybe they never knew...
they had the capacity to appreciate beauty until they got out of their neighborhood, and once they saw what other rocks were up to, well, they were changed. Earth would be crack to these guys. Music. So much music, pouring out of this green globe without effort. They couldn't stay away.

There's not an argument against it that doesn't sound like hubris; there's not an argument for it that doesn't sound like wishful thinking.

Anyway: All my life I've wanted to see an unexplained light in the sky. I would have preferred the classic hovering cigar-shape moving at a slow rate of speed before it zipped off in another direction, but you can't have everything. For that matter I'd prefer the “Close Encounters” mothership appearing behind the water tower, because that would certainly give us all something to talk about besides the economy. Then again, probably not; “Giant spacecraft lands, releases abductees; state weighs $1.2 million emergency bill for housing, retraining.”

SHUTUP you say. WHAT DID YOU SEE? Well, I'm used to lights overhead, because we're under the approach to the airport. One by one, day after day, the great planes descend over Jasperwood. I'm used to private planes, low-slow cargo planes, hella loud transports. The sky is always busy.

This was a bright point of light, fairly low in the sky, and it moved from east to west in a straight line – it jiggled up and down a bit, but it was east to west, not angled. It drew a white line, took less than a second to travel halfway across the sky, and vanished.

I thought: wow.

I blinked and thought again: wow.

So what was it? Meteorite? Again, straight line across, not angled down. Plane? Too fast – unless it was very close, like two blocks away, and turned its lights on and off. But I would have heard it; I hear the planes sometimes before I see them. I just don't know. If I saw it on YouTube I wouldn't believe it; I'd think someone had waved a penlight flash, nothing more. The telltale jiggles show it was the work of a human hand. (The Telltale Jiggles are playing at First Avenue this weekend, by the way.)

But it wasn't that. I know what I saw, and I know where I saw it. Up there. Impossibly fast. Here, then there, then gone. I'd say meteor, no prob, but it was parallel to the earth, and that's one hell of an approach angle. I suppose the jiggle could be explained by atmospheric light scattering, and yes, I just sort of made that up.

What an unfulfilling experience. No answers, nothing conclusive – just a tantalizing moment that doesn't plug into anything you know, but winks at things you suspect. I keep looking outside, knowing I won't see it, but wishing I could. I suppose it's like hearing a strange chord out of nowhere – silence is never quite the same again for a long time.
And I was worried about what I’d write for my Sunday column.

Today: 100 mysteries, and a pizza-centric entry in Friday Fargo / Google Street views. Early meetings and other botherations will interfere with buzz.mn, but I’m just following my employer’s priorities. See you soon, here or there.

Ever seen one yourself? As if I have to prime the comment-pump. 😊

And I cannot resist this.

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**160 RESPONSES TO Friday, Feb. 06: alert shado**

**Shaky Barnes** says:
February 8, 2009 at 9:50 pm

OMG, Lileks didn’t have a new post today! Do you suppose the Men in Black got him? Was he abducted and anal-probed??

**Lileks** says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:12 am

I'm reading them all! This is the epic thread of the new Bleat Comments-feature-thing.

**Otis** says:
February 9, 2009 at 4:51 am

…just another rememberance of two other saucer “events”…

While driving home late one Summer night back in good ol' MN (yes Dave, I grew up in and around the mpls/spl area for 27 years of my...
56 yr life) after closing up the pizza joint I managed in 1971, I was only about a mile from home on that partial moonlit night when I saw something out of the corner of my eye. So I slowed down quickly and looked over to my right to see what it was.

To my shock and amazement there were two cables hanging down to the power lines alongside the road and coming from some sort of craft about 30 ft above. I quickly turned off my lights and engine and silently rolled to a stop about 75 yards down the road. Then I leaned across the seat and with my heart pounding I peaked a look at it just below my car's roof edge. Spooked to see the craft just hovering there, I took a deep breath and quietly opened my door so I could step out.

Not sure what to expect I carefully got out of the car and stopped a bit until I could peak over the top of the roof of my car and take a good look. I studied it for maybe 15 seconds or so before I saw the cables being retracted upwards. The craft was very similar to the one I had seen with my 11 friends two or three years before, but it really seemed odd about the cables hanging down and being attached to the power lines. Realizing this was a pretty desolate road at that hour, I silently got back into my car again.

Anyway, I was so freaked out by what I saw, I started my car and slammed it into Drive as I sped off down the road to my place. As I was leaving I could still see the object hovering over the lines in my rear-view mirror, which was something of a relief.

When I got home I was shaking and still pretty shook up as my roomies commented that I was white as a ghost. I couldn't talk for a few moments as I slowly began to calm down. Once I explained to them what I saw I took the usual UFO ribbing and then that was followed by their obvious envy about my event. Even now I still get worked up when recalling the experience.

The other intriguing ET experience is more of a dream-like experience I had, though it is not unlike similar experiences I experienced in my early childhood. This one is interesting since it involves the Nordics that some people also tell about.

During this experience I may or may not have made direct contact with an 8 ft tall, slim, medium length pure blond-haired, blue-eyed ET. The man was dressed in a pale blue jump-suit and comfortable looking shoes.

The scene inside his craft was breathtaking. Not sure how I got there, the “man” welcomed me with a nice firm handshake and smile as he announced that he was expecting me. 

Hmmm... Filled with nervous excitement and anticipation of what may happen next, I managed a thin smile back. As we stood there for a moment or two looking each other over I couldn’t help but turn my view to the immense ceiling and the room under it.

The transparent bubble ceiling that poured itself down to floor level all around was about 60ft high at its apex and featured a view of a huge panorama of stars. There were about 8 large spars or ribs running from the floor to the apex of the bubble ceiling with two more rows running horizontally all the way around it at about 20ft increment spacings. The room itself had a faint warm glow of light around the perimeter that was pleasant to the eyes. The room's floor was about 150ft in diameter as a full round circle, which was metallic looking and spotless.

The only other thing in the room was a 20ft crescent shaped desk directly below the apex of the bubble ceiling. There were some small dimly lit buttons set in an array inlaid into the table top, but
other than that, the desk was empty.

Shortly after we met, the man extended an arm as if to point me in a direction I was to go. I took his lead to the side of the craft and found a doorway there that lead downward. Afraid of what be at hand, the man sensed this and reassured me that it would be okay to proceed and that nothing would happen that was bad.

Hey...I think a lot of things are bad, but not all, so I continued down a carpeted hallway that was designed to go to a lower level. Once at the end of the hallway, we entered another room, which was brightly lit but not so much as to shock your eyes.

Here I saw other human looking people only with light skin and dark hair, maybe three or four hovering over someone lying back on a couch-like recliner. There were at least two females and two males observing an obviously pregnant woman laying there.

She seemed very happy with beautiful features and a pleasant grace about her face that was surrounded by silky long brunette hair. In fact everyone in the room, except for me, seemed to have this zen-like quality and grace about them. Very pleasing, I thought.

After a few minutes I was asked to come over and meet the woman on the couch. Not wanting to be the stooge, I complied and briefly touched her extended hand as she lay there smiling at me. Then one of the female attendants came over and ushered me back to where I had been standing while another one put some sort of medical looking blanket over the woman on the couch.

A few moments later the male attendants came from another room carrying a small plastic looking box. Then one of the female attendants stooped down to look under the cover over the woman and before I knew it, she had extracted a bouncing bundle of joy in the form of a baby boy from the woman.

The other attendant handed a small cloth to her and then she wrapped him and laid him down gently in the box before being ushered away into another room. The little baby seemed to have the same look of peace and contentment on its face as its mother when it was brought into the light. It's eyes closed softly, it never even made as much as a whimper when it arrived.

The woman on the couch looked only mildly exasperated with just a few tiny beads of sweat on her head. She was smiling and seemed deeply satisfied with the way things had gone.

Then the nordic man tapped me on the shoulder and whispered that we should go so the woman could get some rest. With that we turned and went back up the hallway to the large room again. Once there, I asked him what all that had been about?

His reponse. “We simply wanted you to see how much we are like you, including the way we procreate. There is more that will be revealed to you soon and this is often the way we do it with other civilizations very much like yours. There will be a time when you will need to know this as your civilization and ours begin to merge on a very large scale. In a way, you are a messenger and someday the time will come for you to reveal this to the world from the comfort of your own home. The message is not as imperative to us as it will be to your civilization since there are many perils in its future that may one day lead to a beneficial intercession with our own. We hope this is not the case for the sake of your civilization, but there has been concern over its development for some time, including from others monitoring it.”

“I see”, I said. “It looks like my life will never be the same again.” I
replied.

“Believe it or not you do have all the necessary “tools” you will need to help you in your life’s journey. You are not alone and one day you will know who the “others” are that are in your world to help you. In the meantime try not to make too much out of it and simply realize that it is all part of the natural order of things in life and something your civilization may one day greatly appreciate.” he added.

So I asked, “Will I meet with you again?”

“Probably not if your world is able to redevelop itself in some fashion that is in keeping with the natural order. However if this does not happen soon, then yes, there is a very good chance we will meet again”, he replied.

With that the “event” ended as mysteriously as it began as I woke in my bed, which left me feeling just a little bewildered since what I experienced had significant relevance to another “event” that occurred a year or two earlier.

I should add that the comment on this board about life being composed of conjunctive waveforms of energy is very insightful and important since it forms the basis of our mutual manifest destinies in this world and from outside of our world.

I believe that the day may not be far off when we will understand fundamental energy wave relationship principles more deeply and discover ways to use them so that we may create synchronous perturbances in the very fabric of the space-time continuum that allows us to travel great distances through the Universe.

Once we do, I suspect that popping in and out of anyone's space will be an everyday thing for us just as it may be for those already there. I also think the key to those discoveries and many others is being able to admit to ourselves that we know almost nothing at all, yet we truly yearn for the knowledge we must have to survive in a complex universe filled with mystery and wonder.

I also don’t believe that a divine creator would have made so much beauty in the Universe for us to see firsthand without giving us the ability to do so. That’s just not right. For now I will put my faith in humanity and its ability to find a way to make this world succeed to the point that at some point we do develop a technology that may turn the entire planet into a spacecraft long before any anomalous threat can destroy it, or us for that matter. Perhaps then we will finally see the Universe through the eyes we were intended to, our own.

Karen Standeford says:
February 9, 2009 at 8:46 am

Glad to see this is not such an unusual occurrence! I used to live in Arkansas, in a teeny tiny town, and I had gone out one night to toss some stuff into the compost heap. Very dark; very clear. Suddenly, all the street lights and other lights in town blinked off, or so it seemed. Then, a very bright light appeared in the Eastern sky, came at me and passed with intense brightness and speed directly overhead. Seemed to be low, but who knows? All I saw was light! Then, gone. Street lights came back on; life continued. Never saw anything like it before or since.
zuker says:
February 9, 2009 at 3:19 pm

Sounds like a Boride Meteorite. I saw one once. Giant white light that streaked across the sky before disappearing. The news reported on it the next night.

SullyAg says:
February 9, 2009 at 3:59 pm

IT'S 1980

Just sayin' ...

Harold Combs says:
February 10, 2009 at 3:12 pm

What Lileks saw was almost certainly NOT a satellite because almost all satellites are launched on a west to east trajectory to take advantage of the earth's rotation. There are some polar satellites that orbit mostly south to north but these could not account for James observation. Meteors are usually seen moving east to west for precisely the same reason, as the earth rotates, a rock entering the atmosphere will appear to travel east to west. What he saw may have been a meteor but until there is some verification we will have to agree that Mr. Lileks did see a UFO. I am jealous. My wife saw three triangular UFOs one night in 1994 but I have never seen anything other than meteors.

krissy says:
February 13, 2009 at 3:23 am

One night when I was 13 I was up very late, and this was shortly before the internet was around to distract. So I watched the sky from my window. I saw a huge triangular craft that sort of blended into the sky if you weren't really looking close. Its underside looked like the night sky, and stars- but was a slightly different shade from the sky. And it was just too gigantic to be a plane or a satellite (it practically covered the sky.) Once I realized what it could be, a light shone into my room (down from my ceiling in an obviously unnatural way) and I was frozen in fear. I felt that if I could just pretend that it wasn't there then it would go away. I got into bed and clenched my eyes shut under the covers until I passed out. The next day I was fine.

Then a few weeks ago a friend and I saw a mysterious colored portal open up a few feet above the ground outside during the day. She saw it as blue, and I saw it as a greenish.

When you see something as seemingly real as reality, how can you dispute it?

Steve W says:
February 18, 2009 at 4:50 am

Me and friends saw a similarly mundane UFO several years ago. We were on the beach at Eastbourne around 11pm. A red light zigzagged from the North horizon and vanished South towards France. From horizon to horizon it took 2 or 3 seconds without sonic boom or any sound at all. As an amateur astronomers, I know that it wasn't meteorological or a fast airplane piloted by a drunk.
Like you, I’m mildly disappointed that it didn’t provide evidence of ET life. Still, it was memorable.

regards,
S

Elissa says:
February 18, 2009 at 12:11 pm

On February 5th, 2009 at 7:15PM, I saw a BIG BALL OF LIGHT in the SSW sky. When did you see yours? In the morning? And are you being serious, because I AM truly trying to figure out what I saw. Are you in Minnesota? Just wondering.
Saturday night I was on Coast to Coast with Ian Punnit. At 12:30 AM. When I got back from afternoon errands my wife said, somewhat quizzically, “you got a call from . . . Coast to Coast, and they want to know if you want to be on with Ian Punnit? After midnight?”

“Sure,” I said.

I mean, what else can you say? I used to be on Ian’s show a few years ago; I always listened to Coast to Coast on the way home from the Diner. I had a thin, unsupportable, easily-explained UFO story. Why not pour a Balvenie, wander around the house in the witching hour and talk to the nation?

So I did. Nothing much to report, except that it was fun. You’re never short of callers when you bring up UFOs on any show – good Lord, Dr. Laura could do three hours on the subject and have full banks, even if she yelled at the callers for looking up at the sky instead of looking into themselves.

Afterwards I finished the rest of “Braveheart,” which I hadn’t seen in years. As history, it’s . . . fanciful, but it’s still a fine movie. You put that one together with “The Patriot” and “Apocalypto” and it’s the same story – the individual against distant centralized authority. Good thing that battle’s won; no worries...
now about someone telling you what to eat or say, or whether a mailed hand will treat your wallet and property as its own, and expect you to be content with what it permits you to keep.

Yes, that's a great relief.

**Sunday** I did the errands I hadn't finished on Saturday. Such are the thrills of my life. Got a haircut; the stylist, one of the endless parade of interchangeable young women who snip and clip and listen, was a bit smarter than the rest. When not cutting heads she helped her parents' property management business. Unlike 50 percent of the stylists I've had in the last few years, she didn't have the single-mom / tattoo combo that makes you suspect the person's life is somehow fixed in place for a long while, like a butterfly held in a case by a long sharp pin.

After the cut I went to Southdale to look for a tie, since the Super Secret Strib Project involves new clothes. This is certainly the time to buy things. Ties had been reduced from the usual price no one ever pays anyway, but the discount was nice: from $47.99 to $27.99. Fifteen percent off if you used your Macy's card. If you bought a charity pin for two dollars, you got an additional 20% off. I selected some conservative ties, noting with horror a woman who was buying ties for her husband. He was walking along behind, unconcerned, tethered in ways he only dimly seemed to understand, watching her mate one horrid tie with an equally horrid shirt. She had a fistful. “The selection is so much better here than the Mall of America, she said.

*Uh huh*, he said.

“I mean that was just awful. They didn’t have anything.”

*Uh huh*, he said.

I took my purchase to the counter, where a frowning Russian who looked like Harvey Keitel rang them up. Next: Eddie Bauer. Again, sales. Everything that ended in “.99” was half off. HALF. This meant a leather briefcase that had gone for $200, and had been marked down to $99, was fifty bucks. Fifty! When I got to the register I apologized for not having my Eddie Bauer Friends card, and the clerk said she could find me – whereupon one of the clerks, to my amazement, said “Oh, Jim’s in the system.” Whereupon another clerk turned around and said “You’re James Lileks, the columnist! I love your columns!

Oh, that never gets old. I suppose when you reach a level of ubiquitous fame modern slang-enthusiasts would describe as sick you would tire of being praised by strangers in public, but for the majority of people in the typing game it’s like being hosed down with warm ambrosia. *Why, yes, I am!* *Why yes. Thank you.* You’re always a bit surprised to find that the things you type are actually disseminated beyond your own head.

Gap: got the annual Chuck Taylors. Did I want a Gap card? I did not. Express Men: got three shirts. Because you saved a lot of you bought three! Did I want a credit card? I did not. Back to Macy’s for another tie to match one of the
shirts I'd bought. Same clerk: the serious Russian.

“Is there a problem with the ties?” he asked.

There was not, but for a moment I was glad he asked. I bought another tie – a purple number, although I’m sure it would rather be known as plum – and we had a conversation about iPhones, since I’d pulled mine out to check something. He loved his iPhone but was wanting the Flash, and could not to be understanding why the Flash was not a thing to be had. Then I walked outside to my car, and hello:

It’s Castrol and Pollux! Another identical Element. It was slightly cleaner than mine. (I’m on the right.)

I drove to the car wash. As I entered the wash, I turned off all the vents, recalling the conversation I’d had with the dealership’s manager. He had heard my complaint about the necessity to close the vents before running through a wash, and promised to get back to me. He had been so concerned. He was so grave when I told my tale. He never got back to me. Not even to offer an oil change. A while later the dealership announced they wouldn’t be doing any vehicle service on Saturdays. I understand; who has free time to run the car in on a Saturday?

Drove to Target to get a few things. Returned to the car, and hello:
I saw the couple get out of the car, and I stopped them in the parking lot. Asked them if they’d been at Southdale earlier. No, they hadn’t. But they liked to park their Element by identical ones when they saw them.

*Yours is so much cleaner*, she said.

I explained I had seen one cleaner than mine – I showed them the iPhone picture – and had been shamed into getting a wash.

We parted as friends, the fraternity of the Green Element Owners. When I got to my car I noticed that they were from the District of Columbia. Wanted to run back to the store and ask them which neighborhood? How do you like it here? Because I know what it’s like. *FREEDOM!*

Without the whole pulling-out-your-guts-on-the-king's-orders part. But Freedom nevertheless.

**Later:** Matchbook, and antique store finds. Stay tuned.

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**48 RESPONSES TO *monday, feb. 09***

*Al Federber* says:

February 9, 2009 at 12:32 am

You have such tender sensibilities about so many subjects, but you can turn right around and say things that make me absolutely cringe.

Why must you publicly slag on the “interchangeable young women” who cut your hair? Is it really necessary to announce that one of them is “a bit smarter than the rest”? Have a freakin’ heart, man.

Re Mel Gibson movies: where was your love of the theme of “the
individual against distant centralized authority” when you were
giddily hosting Republican bigwigs at your home during the 2008
convention?

carefulnow says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:45 am
You must not ever listen to Dr. Laura. She does not exhort people to
look into themselves. Dr. Phil maybe. Not Dr. Laura.

Margaret says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:57 am
Get a grip, Al. If you are over the age of 40 and get your hair cut by a
tattoed 20 something at factory place, all the chicks are alike unless
you happen to know one of them personally. And the conversation
is generally painful unless you hit one who happens to be
overeducated or on a second career. Hey 19.

As for the big wigs—if you read the accounts you’d know that James’
party was for the bloggers and talk radio heads. I am sure that there
was plenty of focus on the theme of individual vs. central authority.

PickyPicky says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:57 am
Too bad you didn’t give the Lileks fanbase a heads-up about your
Coast to Coast gig. I’d have tuned in. I used to be a regular caller to
Art Bell back in the late 80s, but drifted away from Coast as it drifted
into the land of Weekly World News. Time-traveling space-alien
ghosts with 100mpg carburetors that cure AIDS with magnetized
silver colloids can burn a guy out sooner than you’d think.

mpbk says:
February 9, 2009 at 1:03 am
I did not see the paragraph in totality as a slag on female hair
stylists. There’s aching empathy in the metaphor “a butterfly held in
a case by a long sharp pin”.

I could be wrong, but I don’t recall James mentioning any DC
politicians showing up at his house.

Dave says:
February 9, 2009 at 1:34 am
mpbk, you don’t recall JL writing about the night that Newt, Fred,
Mitt and Rudy visited Jasperwood for an evening of Parcheesi and
stogies?

Steam McQueen says:
February 9, 2009 at 1:59 am
OF COURSE the Russian at Macy’s was unfriendly. Customer service
is not something that Russians come by naturally.

Not surprised you had a conversation about the iphone. To a
Russian, a phone is more than a tool, it is a status symbol, which is
why in Russia they get new ones every six months.
ScottG says:
February 9, 2009 at 2:41 am

It would have been much more cool had you been on Space Ghost Coast to Coast.

Todd says:
February 9, 2009 at 2:42 am

James:
I also drive a green Element (Metallic Kiwi, they call it). My kids call it the Green Toaster.

This is:
A) Proof I've been reading you too many years, and now am subconsciously emulating you. Soon I'll be stalking you to find out what brand doggie treats you buy;
B) An example of “Great minds think alike”; Or
C) A complete coincidence.

Of course the answer is ... hold a sec. Gotta feed the dog.

“Here Jasper! C'mon boy!”

I kid. I kid. It's C. But for the record, I've never had another green Element driver park next to me. Weird.

James says:
February 9, 2009 at 4:26 am

Maybe nowadays, in the era of total car alarm coverage, this can’t happen anymore: but when I bought my first car in the early 90’s (a black ford taurus) I was one of the few select 34,945,493 owners. At least 2-3 times a year I would jam my keys into the lock and curse at my inability to open the door. Of course, I was attempting to open another's car, but it was amazing how many times it happened.

I wonder if cowboys in the old days ever experienced the problem of mounting “their” trusted steed, only to be confused by the horse's refusal to obey the “giddyup” command. “what's wrong with this infernal nag!...oh wait...”

James says:
February 9, 2009 at 4:30 am

...re: haircuts. As a 30-something, I appreciate any 20-year old talking to me, touching my head...anything, tattooed or not.

As I read in a classic National Lampoon years ago regarding the signs of male aging:

Age 30 – Become officially invisible to 18-year old girls.

GardenStater says:
February 9, 2009 at 5:09 am

Well, maybe a 30-year-old is invisible to 18-year-old girls, it's true.

But a 48-year-old is repulsive to them.
Unless he's got lots of money….

**DrBear says:**
February 9, 2009 at 7:36 am

There's only one thing better than being recognized...and that's to have somebody tell you they heard good things about you, especially if that somebody is your wife of less than a year. True story; she was working the overnight shift at Kinko's when the local cop came in to check on her as he did occasionally (good police work there). She had her full name on the name tag, just her first, and he noticed...

"Do you know a (me)?"
"Yes, he's my husband."
"Wow! I'll have to tell everybody I met a celebrity's wife!"
(And THAT was when I was doing a weekly column on the distant No. 2 paper in town. Now both the paper and Kinko's have been swallowed up and gone.)

**Patrick says:**
February 9, 2009 at 7:59 am

I get that funny feeling whenever I drive down the road and see another car exactly like mine, a silver 2005 Ford Focus ZX4 4-door sedan. I try to look in the car to see who's driving. If it's a driver of the female species, I try to see how attractive she looks. If it's a male, I try to sum him up to see if we would make great buddies.

A couple of times I'd accidentally gotten into the wrong car. It was mainly because the color and the shape was the same. Half the time it would be the wrong brand.

**Bob says:**
February 9, 2009 at 8:01 am

“It's like being hosed down with warm ambrosia.”
Good thing I was in between sips of coffee, I would have a big mess on my computer screen right now.

**Bob says:**
February 9, 2009 at 8:04 am

Incidentally, isn't it “Castor”, not “Castrol”? Unless of course, that's the triplet brother who's kind of greasy and no one talks about.

**Static says:**
February 9, 2009 at 8:37 am

Element – any color – ICK

**wiredog says:**
February 9, 2009 at 8:38 am

I bought my Element (“Sunset Orange”) back in '05 when the lower half was still all plastic. Never had problems with the vents freezing, but here in NoVa (McLean) it's a bit warmer then Minnesota is. Hardly saw any Elements on the road until I bought it, then I saw them everywhere.
Got the roof rack so I’d have a place to strap surfboards.

Ken says:
February 9, 2009 at 8:41 am

I knew right away that your car was the one on the right. How? The other one is not between the lines and I just couldn’t see you doing that 😊

Gibbering Madness says:
February 9, 2009 at 9:07 am

Incidentally, isn’t it “Castor”, not “Castrol”?

A joke on the color of the vehicle. Castrol’s trade dress is green.

stacylane says:
February 9, 2009 at 9:25 am

In the first Double Element picture, of course the Lileks Mobile is the one on the right. The one on the left appears to be illegally parked. You would never, and if you unintentionally did, you’d save it for a column.

swschrad says:
February 9, 2009 at 9:29 am

erands could be fun. mine were multiple trips to Menards, we’re gutting and redoing the bathroom. field-dressing it. I need a nice, long, soothing soak in the whirlpool. except that’s why we’re gutting the can, to build one in.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 9, 2009 at 9:34 am

James February 9th, 2009 | 4:26 am

Maybe nowadays, in the era of total car alarm coverage, this can’t happen anymore: but when I bought my first car in the early 90’s (a black ford taurus) I was one of the few select 34,945,493 owners. At least 2-3 times a year I would jam my keys into the lock and curse at my inability to open the door. Of course, I was attempting to open another’s car, but it was amazing how many times it happened.

My Dad got in and started another 66 Impala SS after a brew at his old watering hole (The Hilltop!). Wasn’t so much that he was in the glow of the beer, but more to the point that other Impala (a clone!) was parked in his usual parking spot. At least he didn’t bring it home.

Discovered in 91 that the key to my Mustang would unlock and start my buddy's Bronco. Of course I would swing by his office every few weeks to start it up and move it to the other side of the parking lot…

Al Federber says:
February 9, 2009 at 10:05 am

@Margaret – “...all the chicks [who cut hair in malls] are alike unless you happen to know one of them personally.” Sorry, but people aren’t all alike, even if you and Mr. Lileks choose to superficially think otherwise. Even if one thinks such things, to yap
about it in mixed company is pretty callous.

As for Mr. Lileks' 2008 Republican bash, I recall him gleefully bleating that Dick Armey was in his back yard! I'd turn on the sprinklers and call the dogcatcher if Armey appeared on my lawn, and I'm not even a Democrat.

Mr. Lileks has been an apologist for centralized authority and the expansion of empire at least since 9/11. To hear him now tout individual rights in opposition to such authority rings a bit hollow.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 9, 2009 at 10:16 am

Al Federber, oh so grumpy, keep sticking it to the man, man, the darn hypocrites.

Time for Monty Python reference:

Brian: You don't need to follow me. You don't need to follow anybody! You've got to think for yourselves. You're all individuals!
FOLLOWERS:
Yes, we're all individuals!
BRIAN:
You're all different!
FOLLOWERS:
Yes, we are all different!
DENNIS:
I'm not.
ARThUR:
Shhhh.
FOLLOWERS:
Shh. Shhhh. Shhh.
BRIAN:
You've all got to work it out for yourselves!
FOLLOWERS:
Yes! We've got to work it out for ourselves!
BRIAN:
Exactly!
FOLLOWERS:
Tell us more!
BRIAN:
No! That's the point! Don't let anyone tell you what to do!

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 9, 2009 at 10:25 am

On cars. December 2007 we bought a new/used 2006 Ford Escape Hybrid, gray metallic for my wife. It is the first real “belly button” (everyone has one) car we have owned. I see a near identical one about once a week.

This past December I got a new/used 2007 Mercury Milan for my commute. I assumed as my first American car, it would be fairly common. I have yet to see another of any color. Closest is a Ford Fusion about once a week.

Outside of truck, minivans, and SUVs, US cars are not very common here on the left coast.

I feel like an individual 😊
Gibbering Madness says:
February 9, 2009 at 10:30 am

Sorry, but people aren’t all alike, even if you and Mr. Lileks choose to superficially think otherwise. Even if one thinks such things, to yap about it in mixed company is pretty callous.

Have you ever had your hair cut at a mall chain? Employee turnover is so great that you’re not particularly likely to ever get the same person twice. Cosmetologists often come from a similar background, and those will tend to look alike, act alike, and be of the same age.

But then, you’re not really interested in reality, are you? If you can identify Offense, then you can identify Victims! And if you can identify Victims, then you are the Right Sort of Person!

I’d turn on the sprinklers and call the dogcatcher if Armey appeared on my lawn, and I’m not even a Democrat.

I’d extend a cold courtesy to anyone from Barack Obama to Kim Il Jong who appeared on my lawn, rather than “turn on the sprinklers”, but I guess that’s the difference between being a grownup and a politicizing hipster.

Carolyn says:
February 9, 2009 at 10:33 am

Re: getting recognized. For a long time I wrote a column for our local weekly paper. I would get feedback sometimes when out and about and also sort of felt surprised that anyone was reading.

My elderly dad lived with us in those days and once had a major health crisis in the middle of the night. We called 911. After the medics stabilized him and loaded him onto a stretcher, one of them turned to me and said, quite cheerfully: “I love your column.”

I basked in the ambrosia glow of fame while cleaning the blood from the bathroom floor.

MadAboutParis says:
February 9, 2009 at 10:37 am

If you are ever in Cincinnati and park your Green Element by mine, wait for me and I’ll buy you a bottle of Balvenie if you’ll autograph your books for us.
Bon Lundi!
Mary

Al Federber says:
February 9, 2009 at 10:43 am

@Gibbering – But I AM “interested in reality”. It’s just that I try not to let my reality be determined by making assumptions based on superficialities.

Also, I’m not into the whole PC victimhood culture, so there’s another one of your assumptions gone wrong.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 9, 2009 at 11:02 am

I am on Al’s side. It is annoying when some people lump other
people into like thinking groups:

“And it's not surprising then that they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations,”

Ben-David says:
February 9, 2009 at 11:26 am

My dad had a sky-blue AMC Pacer for a time. Other Pacer owners would toot their horns as they passed.

definitemaybe says:
February 9, 2009 at 11:55 am

I would definitely turn the sprinklers on Kim Jong Il . . . Obama and tattooed hair stylists get hosed down with warm ambrosia!

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:05 pm

“I would definitely turn the sprinklers on Kim Jong Il”

I might to but, not out of hostility, I just want to see if his pompadour stays up.

Bob Dole's Communist Doppelganger says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:11 pm

If I see Kim Jong Il on my lawn, I think I'd rub my eyes, blink a couple of times, and theatrically toss away a jug marked “xxx”.

Though somebody keeps getting into my trash, and I'm pretty sure it's Mugabe. Or raccoons.

John says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:31 pm

We were visiting my grandparents once in the late 80's when my mom, sister and grandmother took the old Lincoln out for a quick shopping trip. We got a call to come rescue them from a parking lot down the street because the car was acting possessed.

The car was running, but half of the electrical systems weren't working. The electric windows and radio wouldn't work and the windshield wipers would randomly turn on for a few minutes and then go off.

Turns out they were using the key to a Winnebago. It actually unlocked the door and started the engine. Crazy!

grs says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:34 pm

A friend of my mother's, staying with us for a few weeks long, long ago, borrowed our car, a big Olds convertible, to register her kids in school. She drove back with somebody else's similar-looking big Olds convertible. I asked whose car that was in our driveway. My mom's friend thought I was teasing her. Things may have changed in recent times, but historically there haven't been very many key
combinations for car ignitions.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 9, 2009 at 12:40 pm

Lack of key combinations was true of old Volkswagen beetles as well and compounded as the pins in the locks wore down.

I had a friend get locked out of his beetle once and was quite upset. I comely walked over, asked the guy with the coat hanger to step aside and opened the door with my mom's VW key.

Alec says:
February 9, 2009 at 1:15 pm

I suppose it comes off a bit condescending, but I don't think James meant any disrespect about hairstylists. He captured a real sentiment about their position in society that I think many share. It's more like pity, which I guess can be construed as condescending.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 9, 2009 at 1:37 pm

Good point Alec and I like to add that the “parade” of young people flowing through the hair cafeterias can actually mean a few things.

Other than just giving up on the hair biz, they could be moving on to more independent shops where they will have a chance to be more of an individual and have real relationships with their customers.

No pity needed, no condescending attitude required.

RLR says:
February 9, 2009 at 2:03 pm

Last “hair cafeteria” ‘do I received put my spouse in stitches for 15 minutes. (She called me Mullet Boy for a month afterwards.)

I got a set of clippers, a couple of mirrors, and learned to DIY. Things got even easier after I got hold of a Flowbee.

I'm one of those guys James makes fun of in his 70s books. You should see my bottlecap collection, nailed to the wall.

MichaelsDaddy says:
February 9, 2009 at 3:50 pm

Is there any way of getting a listen to that Coast to Coast interview without signing up? I mean, it'd be highly entertaining, but I can't fathom shelling out precious cash when I could have recorded it for free had I been paying attention. I guess it could be considered “ignorance tax”

GardenStater says:
February 9, 2009 at 4:09 pm

I stopped going to “salons” years ago. Now I go to Bob's Barbershop, where Bob and his son Mike open the doors at 6AM every Saturday, and serve coffee and doughnuts to the crowd of regulars (which
includes me and my 12-year-old son, who likes how Mike does a Marine fade. It's an old-fashioned place, with lots of good-natured bantering, and piles of car magazines and Playboys. Twelve bucks for a cut, and all the coffee you can drink. Try getting that at a mall salon!

juanito - John Davey says:
February 9, 2009 at 4:32 pm

Ben-David
February 9th, 2009 | 11:26 am

My dad had a sky-blue AMC Pacer for a time. Other Pacer owners would toot their horns as they passed.

I know James may think otherwise, but, because misery loves company?

Lily says:
February 9, 2009 at 6:07 pm

Todd the answer to A. is Frosty Paws.

I do not drive an Element. I have a plum colored Scion which people often confuse with Elements, but Scions are smaller and cuter and even more toaster-like. Every time my husband gets out of the car he feels compelled to to announce to anyone in the vicinity, “It's my wife's car.” There are very few Scions in my area, when I see one I always wave no matter what the color.

Stephen B says:
February 9, 2009 at 8:05 pm

I want to Balvenie.

Stacy says:
February 10, 2009 at 12:48 pm

Always late to the party, I am.

Only Scions are “toasters,” to be referred to in the most derogatory tone of voice available. Elements are cool, hip, boxy (but good). I have a silver one (my orange one having been turned upside down by a rude minivan), husband drives an orange one with dark panels.

We've driven them since they came off the line in 2003, and still fondly recall when Element owners would gleefully wave at each other in passing, as if to say, “Hey, you were cool and hip enough to buy a car shaped like a box, too!”

It was with great joy I noticed yesterday a new couple moving into the neighborhood…parked in the driveway an apple green Element and a burgundy SC Element (*sniff*). I suppose we shall have to be Best Friends.

...Makes Me Furious » Blog Archive » Bleat » Monday, Feb. 09 says:
February 11, 2009 at 7:52 pm

[...] When I got to the register I apologized for not having my Eddie Bauer Friends card, and the clerk said she could find me –
whereupon one of the clerks, to my amazement, said “Oh, Jim’s in the system. …Page 2 […]
To repeat what I said on Twitter, Monday felt like six Mondays compacted into one neutron-star-dense Monday with a core made of rotten molten Monday, orbited by the planet Monday. Its moons: Monday, Monday, and Monday. Usually I don't mind Monday, but things are different now; different for the better, in many ways, but like a dog I hate my routines to be upset, and there are some tradeoffs I'll discuss in the near future when we take the wraps off.

Then again, it's Tuesday now, and that means the most wonderful night of the week, Friday, is beginning to be heard over the horizon. If the wind is right.

The wind is wrong, though; it brings freezing rain tonight, so driving around tomorrow should be Hans Brinker time. I had a moment today on the road where I wanted to put a Tomahawk through the car in front of me, because it was UNAWARE OF ME. This is, and is not, as selfish as it sounds; when I have to turn left against oncoming traffic, I get my corpus into the intersection, so the vehicle behind me can turn in my wake if it chooses. But I got behind someone who dared not nose into the intersection, worried perhaps that the greater distance would make it difficult for me to take in all of her instructive, ruckus-provoking bumperstickers. I didn't follow, because that
would have meant breaking the plane on a red light. My cause was just, but I declined to take the field.

It's always amazing how many people drive with no idea whatsoever of what's behind them. The rear-view mirror might as well be a cable channel not included in their package.

**Anyway.** Part of the problem is the overheated dream state that accompanies getting up earlier than usual. I woke, convinced I was late, at 5:45 AM. A while later I woke from a dream that consisted entirely of me sitting at a desk saying "The dog is absolutely fine" in a John Stewart inflection. Later – and this was uber-creepy – I was walking down the street and came across a small furry robotic torso pulling itself along with its claws; it had the head of Bill Murray. The person with whom I was walking said “That's just a prototype.”

Then I dreamed that I got a tweet from a guy at Ad Age who told me my daughter had put the straw in the juice drink, but hadn't consumed any. It was 6:17 at that point. I laid there, looking at the ceiling fan, thinking how much I hated their ad campaign. RESPECT THE POUCH! RESPECT IT! What the hell is that supposed to mean. What the hell.

**Well,** I can’t say what I did today, it being Super Secret, but it was fun. Afterwards I took Natalie to karate; read another story in the Easy Rawlins short-story collection. In every one of the stories Easy is worried about being drawn back to street life. Well, after four adventures that took place in the course of a month and ended with someone having half a head, I’d say that’s a distinct possibility, but I don’t care about the repetition; I still think the Rawlins books are exceptional pieces of noir fiction, and it’s a loud purple shame they didn’t make six more movies. Denzel Washington wasn’t my idea of Easy, but Bogart wasn’t everyone’s idea of Marlowe, either. (Spade, or Marlowe? He can’t be both. Or can he?) Don Cheadle was Mouse, though – I still see him when I read the stories. Not the face, but the air, the manner, the menace, the smile. In a perfect world there are 6 Easy movies, 6 Harry Bosch movies, 6 lavish Gordianus the Finder movies, and so on. Instead we get High School Musical Nine.

For heaven's sake, there are SIX Aliens movies, and all but two bite the wax tadpole; last night I forced myself to watch some of the latest one, “Aliens Vs. Predator: the Enmurkening,” and it's just awful. (Except for the first 90 seconds of the pool scene.) It was really cool to see the Predator’s point of view in 1987, when an alien who tracked prey with an infrared sensor with six lines of resolution seemed high-tech. but now it's just stupid – as is the WHOOSHENRRRRRRRRR sound whenever they switch to the Predator's view.
Who am I supposed to root for here? Space-Bubba with the bazooka-helmet, or Slimy McTwojaw? Eh.

I listened to some of the press conference; want to read the transcript before I make any judgments, but oy – while it’s a nice change to have a president who can speak off the cuff without hammering out cliches like tin Rheingold, it’s another to have one who opens bags of gilded chaff and feeds them to the box fan. But I’m hard to please. The most passionate and concise speakers I heard today were the monthly parade of lunatics on Medved’s Conspiracy Day show. Nothing makes someone so unhappy, it seems, as grasping a Truth few others dare handle. It all comes down to the same villains: Skull and Bones, the Neocons, The Jewish neocons, the bankers, the Jewish bankers, the Zionists, the Jewish Zionists – who are like super double-reverse Zionists – and the Texas Jewish Rockefeller Neocon Zionists who made Building Seven fall down by shouting ARAB-A-CA-DABRA and sprinkling Jew-dust in the eyes of the media. (Who are all controlled by neocon Jew-World-Order oil-banker Masons ANYWAY.)

So! Tuesday. High hopes. Today: two installments of Black and White World; a creepy comic; small-town website of the week at buzz.mn. Stay tuned.
Don't take the ring.  
Fell a victim.

**Jimbob** says:  
February 10, 2009 at 7:01 am

Technically, you’re not supposed to pull into the intersection while waiting to turn left, because it might block the way for emergency vehicles. I, too, was constantly frustrated by people who didn’t nose into the intersection, but once I realized why this was not a good idea, it doesn’t bother me anymore.

**mcsage** says:  
February 10, 2009 at 7:04 am

God bless you James, every once in a while you slip one of these in just to make my day a little more surreal. To riff on the Scrubbing Bubbles (hey, there’s a girl-band name for ya!) “He dreams it harder, so you don’t have tooooooooo!”

**Stoutcat** says:  
February 10, 2009 at 7:17 am

You forgot Jewish Neocon Skull & Bones. They’re the REAL power these days.

**Bob** says:  
February 10, 2009 at 7:31 am

Heard a little of the people on Medved yesterday. Dude, there are some weird people out there in SERIOUS need of a life, and badly need a shave with Occam’s razor.

**Charles** says:  
February 10, 2009 at 7:44 am

Regarding the motorist who was driving with no clue as to what was behind her — no doubt she is also the type of person who would delight in waving her hand and shaking her head at any and all who she felt offered her some motoring slight (such as being impeded from trying to turn left against oncoming traffic). Worse yet, she is probably the type of person who passionately believes she is a fantastic driver, and that her review mirror is intended for checking her hair, not what’s behind her.

**V the K** says:  
February 10, 2009 at 7:47 am

Worse are the people who intend to go straight through an intersection but inconsiderately block the right turn lane. Also, the people who speed through residential neighborhoods at highway speed. Maybe the very worst are those who push their way to the front of a merge lane and then force their way into the line of cars backed up because of all the other jerks who decide to push their way to the front of the merge lane.

Let’s make this easier. Every driver in Northern Virginia is a jerk.

By the way, your conspiracy theories left out the reverse vampires
and the saucer people.

Crabtree says:
February 10, 2009 at 7:47 am

Would those be the Jackie Masons?

Fred Baumann says:
February 10, 2009 at 8:00 am

In the interest of not making all your readers go crazy, James, a suggested edit:

Instead of: “Well, I can’t say what I did today, it being Super Secret, but it was fun. Afterwards I took Natalie to karate…”

Please leave it at: “I took Natalie to karate…”

I humbly beg that you save allusions to “Super Secret” doin’s for the day when you actually can reveal them. Otherwise, it’s just annoying opaque twaddle — like most of what’s coming from Washington these days.

I’m sorry; that was hyperbolically cruel. Nothing you do, sir, could possibly be that annoyingly opaque!

We all wish you well, and look forward to the Grand Unveiling. But stop nudging us with it, okay?

Lindsay Korst says:
February 10, 2009 at 8:11 am

Bad driver thread! Out here in the Seattle area, we’re notorious for people matching speeds and driving side by side for MILES. Another fav is people tailgating me when I’m driving in the SLOW lane. I think most of it can be traced to cellphoneitus.

Bill Peschel says:
February 10, 2009 at 8:23 am

That was Raul Julia? I remember that movie. I saw it in the theatre as a kid (I remember Michael Sarazhan[?] saying the word “Gumball” into the phone, as if it would summon a genie.

I still use that line.

Re: conspiracy theories, I have a theory.

There’s a sure sign that you’ve developed wisdom about the way the world works:

Step one: Believe in conspiracy theories.
Step two: Realize conspiracy theories are a load of horsefeathers.
Step three: Wish that the world was as well-organized as conspiracy theories would like us to think.

As usual, Mencken said it first and better: “The older I get the more I admire and crave competence, just simple competence, in any field from adultery to zoology.”

rivlax says:
February 10, 2009 at 8:25 am
My pet peeve: People turning on their turn signal long AFTER they've slowed down. It should be the other way around, people!

**GardenStater says:**
February 10, 2009 at 8:33 am

Here you go, Bill: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fw3s9ZMiq0Y

Enjoy!

(It wasn't Dom DeLuise–I can't really tell who it is.)

Look for it around 1:07…

**Bonnie_ says:**
February 10, 2009 at 8:45 am

As a conspiracy fan, I savor a good well structured conspiracy like a fine wine. A nice nose, good oaky flavor, a substantial finish, that's what I like. Roswell, now that's some vintage conspiracy.

The 9-11 Truthers are the homemade moonshine of conspiracy theories — poor flavor, no structure, easily disproven, terrible taste. Give me the tall Nordic aliens anytime. They, at least, have some class.

Yes, my favorite Medved show is Conspiracy Day. How did you know?

**Brian says:**
February 10, 2009 at 8:49 am

I used to nose into the intersection before turning left, but no longer. Turns out it's illegal. I know this for sure because once, while nosing into the intersection, I was in an accident with another car. When I told the cop I was nosing out, I was the one who got the ticket. The lesson: either don't nose out, or don't talk to the police.

**Nancy says:**
February 10, 2009 at 8:53 am

"it's a nice change to have a president who can speak off the cuff " Who were you listening to? Uh, we uh uh, must-eh.....

**Al Federber says:**
February 10, 2009 at 9:02 am

@Nancy – I'm not an Obama fan, but he is light years ahead of George Bush as an orator. For starters, Obama doesn't need to have a tiny radio receiver in his ear during debates, a la Bush. This is because Obama knows what he's talking about, even if we may not agree with it. Bush was more or less clueless.

**GardenStater says:**
February 10, 2009 at 9:04 am

I'm with you, Nancy. Every question got a 10-minute reply that consisted of no answers, just a lot of hot air.

(Combined with “er...umm...uhh...”
**juanito - John Davey** says:
February 10, 2009 at 9:13 am

*RESPECT THE POUCH! RESPECT IT! What the hell is that supposed to mean. What the hell.*

You should just co-opt it, and make it your own.

*RESPECT THE BLEAT! RESPECT IT!*

*RESPECT THE TWEET! RESPECT IT!*

*RESPECT THE BUZZ! RESPECT IT!*

*RESPECT THE SUPER SECRET PROJECT! RESPECT IT!*

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**GardenStater** says:
February 10, 2009 at 9:14 am

*RESPECT BUZZ 2.0! RESPECT IT!*  

(Oh, that's right. It hasn’t happened yet…)

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**Brian Dunbar** says:
February 10, 2009 at 9:36 am

Pulling through to turn left: sometimes I do, when the traffic is right. Sometimes I don't, when I know the stream of oncoming cars is never-ever going to stop, the lights will change and I'll be in the middle, blocking _everybody_.

Because what really peeves me is when I'm waiting to go, the lights change .. and Hapless Harry is in the middle of the intersection, trying to turn left. Dude, I'm ready to go and you're just .. sitting there. Man.

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**Joe the Painter** says:
February 10, 2009 at 9:36 am

While I enjoy a slick oration as much as the next guy (counting ums, uhs, ahs and such has become a hobby now, to where I am considering patenting a beer-drinking game a-la “Hello Bob”), it bears strong suggestion that the words are scrutinized. Watching what little I did of the press circus last night I am reminded again of Robert Preston in The Music Man, as I was throughout the TWO YEARS of presidential campaign.

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**Leslie in AZ** says:
February 10, 2009 at 9:46 am

Those can NOT have been real dreams!!!!

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**dcmatthews** says:
February 10, 2009 at 9:47 am

*Who am I supposed to root for here? Space-Bubba with the bazooka-helmet, or Slimy McTwojaw?*  

Wasn’t “No matter who wins, we lose” the tagline of at one of the AVP movies? (Turns out the audience in the theater is the “we”…)

BTW, Dom DeLuise was in “Cannonball Run”. I’ve never seen
“Gumball Rally” but it sounds like the two movies have very similar plots. Actually, to me it sounds like Burt Reynolds saw “Gumball” and liked it enough to want to make his own version with all his friends (DeLuise, Bert Convy et al).

GardenStater says:
February 10, 2009 at 9:55 am


Ladies and gentlemen, President Harold Hill!

Chris Gumprich says:
February 10, 2009 at 10:02 am

Let’s talk about the important stuff: Powers Boothe was the ultimate screen Marlowe, although I’ll concede that I haven’t seen the Mitchum version.

Bogart’s “Big Sleep” was a great movie, but he was playing Bogart, not Marlowe.

Nancy says:
February 10, 2009 at 10:21 am

“he was playing Bogart”
There is something pretty cool about going to work and just being yourself—and it’s enough. I always loved those movies. Of course I wasn’t bothered by having read the books—that helps.

Ben says:
February 10, 2009 at 10:30 am

Conspiracy theories are all the same. The important thing is “I’m smarter than you are because I know the secret and you don’t”. The general public doesn’t know either. So the conspiracy theorist is special — a cut above.

That's the main reason conspiracy theories all have to be a little wacky. If they're not, then the believers aren't special.

The details of the theory will tell you about the base emotions of the believer. Antisemites will tell you the Jews are behind it. For atheists, it's either the evil churches or space aliens. Financially insecure or financially ignorant folks have the Federal Reserve as their bogeyman. And so on.

But the details aren't really the point. The real point is “I'm smart and I have value”.

I think a lot of these people would give up on their conspiracy nonsense if a few people around them would just be kind. Tell them you value them and respect their intelligence. Tell them they don’t need the weirdness, that they can feel good about themselves without it.

Gibbering Madness says:
February 10, 2009 at 11:02 am

For starters, Obama doesn’t need to have a tiny radio receiver in his ear during debates, a la Bush.
I must concede that’s a rather witty “silly conspiracy theory” reference.

**GardenStater** says:
February 10, 2009 at 11:03 am

I recently read “The Maltese Falcon.” Much better than the movie (more sex). I’d love to see a re-make, with Chris Noth playing Sam Spade.

**roger h (bgbear)** says:
February 10, 2009 at 11:22 am

I get most frustrated when I am making a left turn with people in the crosswalk and the impatient driver behind me thinks they know exactly how far I should creep out in the intersection and how far to let the little old lady get before you roar through the crosswalk behind her.

Some drivers seem to think that you should floor it and zip through the crosswalk in front of or between the pedestrians. This is usually communicated with a blast of the horn which more often than not has the pedestrian giving you a dirty look rather than the impatient driver behind you.

**RebeccaH** says:
February 10, 2009 at 11:24 am

Hooray, James, you read the Easy Rawlins, Harry Bosch, and Gordianus the Finder books too! I love mysteries, especially those set in exotic times and places. I recommend Laura Joh Rowland's Sano Ichiro books, about a samurai detective in 17th century Japan (starting with *Shinju* and *Bundori)*.

**roger h (bgbear)** says:
February 10, 2009 at 11:30 am

Sorry, not Chris Noth. For one thing, Marlowe is blond. The best descriptions in the book is the face of a blond Satan.

Blond Satan WBAGNFARB.

Obama did not “uh” too much last night but, it was far from a great performance. However, if your only point of reference for press conference performance is GWB, I can understand why you would think that BHO knew what he was talking about.

I can tell you that his description of the lesson to learn from Japan was inaccurate to say the least.

**roger h (bgbear)** says:
February 10, 2009 at 11:59 am

I am an idiot, Sam Spade is the “Blond Satan” damn that Bogart for making us confuse the two names.

Mitchum would have been a good Marlowe if he did the part when he was younger.
GardenStater says:
February 10, 2009 at 12:05 pm

Agreed on Mitchum. But I still say Noth would do a bang-up job. And we'll probably never find out...

That being said, I highly recommend reading Dashiell Hammett's novels, especially "Maltese Falcon." Great stuff.

grs says:
February 10, 2009 at 12:14 pm

Re the person who was not Dom DeLuise, Raul Julia's driving partner in the Ferrari appears to have been Tim McIntire, son of wagonmaster John McIntire. He died young, at 43, but did a lot of film and television before that. I love IMDB.

Linda says:
February 10, 2009 at 12:49 pm

Re: Lindsay

Here they are called, "the Minnesota rolling roadblock". Also my highest-ranking driving pet peeve.

I can not believe how many people are completely unaware that they are passenger mirror to driver-side mirror with someone. Open road ahead for miles and two separate mile-long lines of traffic behind them. Arghhh.

I live on a main route to the northern lakes area and see this at least twice every weekend in the summer!

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 10, 2009 at 1:04 pm

I was stunned/floored with Hammett's "Red Harvest" for some reason that I cannot really explain.

Never been done as a movie but, it inspired many movies such as Miller's Crossing and Yojimbo (and it's derivatives).

V the K says:
February 10, 2009 at 1:22 pm

Wsasn't "No matter who wins, we lose" the tagline of at one of the AVP movies?

Also the tagline of the 2008 Presidential Election.

Will says:
February 10, 2009 at 1:32 pm

I do not pull in to the intersection until I can clear it. It's both illegal and dangerous to pull halfway through the intersection and then wait for a chance to turn.

My real driving pet peeve, however, is those clowns who are going to go straight or turn left at a stop sign or traffic light, but pull so far forward that people in the right-turn lane can't see around them.
Headless Unicorn Guy says:
February 10, 2009 at 1:34 pm

For heaven's sake, there are SIX Aliens movies, and all but two bite the wax tadpole...

I assume the only two that don't are the first and second (Alien and Aliens)?

I was stunned/floored with Hammett's “Red Harvest” for some reason that I cannot really explain.

Never been done as a movie but, it inspired many movies such as Miller's Crossing and Yojimbo (and it's derivatives). — Roger H

And Clint Eastwood's Fistful of Dollars…
And Bruce Willis's Last Man Standing…
And even David Drake's Hammer's Slammers novel The Sharp End…

grs says:
February 10, 2009 at 4:03 pm

It is not illegal to enter an intersection and then wait to make a left turn, at least in the state where I live, and those who stop before entering the intersection are blocking traffic unnecessarily.

Glen Green says:
February 10, 2009 at 4:06 pm

Mr. Lileks wrote, ‘I was walking down the street and came across a small furry robotic torso pulling itself along with its claws; it had the head of Bill Murray. The person with whom I was walking said “That's just a prototype.”’

The “That's just a prototype.” was my first and best laugh of the day. I'm not sure why, but that just killed me.

Please, somebody mock-up a picture of this surreal abomination! It begs for an image.

Gray Hackle says:
February 11, 2009 at 7:51 am

I loved Cannonball Run, never saw Gumball Rally.

The scene where Reynolds and de Luise recruit a doctor for their ambulance (Jack Elam). Reynolds asks Elam what sort of doctor he is...a 'proctologist' Elam replies.

‘Well, where is your equipment?’ and Elam just holds up a long bony finger. Priceless.

Fred says:
February 11, 2009 at 12:50 pm

Two things. Gumball Rally was really the better movie and I'm pretty sure it was first. But Cannonball Run(s) were nice and fun too.

And not it is not illegal to enter an intersection and then wait to make a left turn. At least not in States with reasonable driving laws. If you take the Defensive Driving course they even say that it is recommended as it permits you to make the turn on the yellow
whereas otherwise you'll never get anywhere... Intersections where you are not permitted to do this are marked with signs that say (duh) “Do Not Block Intersection” [Laws in your State may vary, if they do you should write your Legislator and try to get it changed...]

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A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! [...]
Last Tuesday, you'll recall, I met the Coffee Angel while sitting in the hallway of the church basement reading an Easy Rawlins short-story collection. Tonight I was sitting in the hallway of the church basement reading an Easy Rawlins short-story collection. (Different story, although he's still worried about being drawn back into the life of the street. Only one person was shot dead in this story, though. One person took it in the leg.) I did not see the Coffee Angel, which didn't surprise me, since I'd never seen him before. But when it came time for choir I went looking for my daughter, and couldn't find her. Usually she's off goofing with a friend named Veronica, but Ronnie wasn't here. I went to the Fellowship Hall, where they usually hid. Called her name. Nothing. This was odd. But I smelled something.

Coffee.

I went back into the hallway; Natalie burst from behind a door and stuck out her tongue, painted garish red from a Ring Pop she'd had for dessert. The joys of a having a happy child! She'll never remember; I'll never forget. In a few months it'll end; freedom from hymns and Tuesday routines. A few months later it'll start up again, the gears will move and the teeth mesh and the routines reassert themselves, and I'll chat with the Moms about how it's actually good to be back to the schedule after the long chaotic summer. I'll have a different book and a lighter jacket, and I won't Twitter it because the church exerts some sort of competitive aura: thou shalt have no incorporeal messaging paradigms before me. One Tuesday will be as the next.
Except now I will always smell the coffee.

Every other month I bring the video camera to a standard event and shoot everything. She may not remember, but she’ll learn. Eight, happy, full of pizza, hiding in the Fellowship Hall with Veronica – it’s the sort of thing I would love to see now, if my parents had filmed things.

Speaking of which: my father called last night; my childhood friend Peter’s father died. He was one of those men who was old when I was a kid, and I mean old old. Mr. B was a serious and decent man, and I think he was somewhat of a proto-geek – Heathkits and Tandy boxes, sensible Pinto station wagon with faux wood, a trailer with window stickers for all the national parks. The last time I saw him was at my mother’s funeral, in the church basement. He was in tears, which stunned me. I had no idea they even knew each other, apart from the usual congress of parents whose kids are friends. But then you grow up and you realize that’s enough.

He was born ten days after the Germans invaded Belgium, starting WW1; he fought in WW2, was captured, escaped from Stalag III-C, made his way to Russia – and returned to the United States. To Fargo. Of this I knew little; I knew he’d been a POW, but we had stupid Hogan’s Heroes ideas about the subject.

He was 94. Here’s his obit. God rest his brave soul.

Wednesday is the fulcrum of the week; at 12:01 PM you can see the flags of the Good Ship Friday on the horizon. This week feels long, long, long, but that’s February – in its own way, it’s the longest month of the year. Right? That makes a certain sort of poetic sense, doesn’t it, since it’s technically the shortest?

No, of course not. O winter, cruel mistress. It’s warm out now; the snow has been beaten down by rain, and the stones of the Oak Island Water Feature are visible once more. The dog’s paths around the yard are gone; the glaciers on the bricks have retreated. Downtown today I snapped a picture of the filth left behind by winter’s withdrawal:
Could be an aerial photo of California after the Great Fire of 2012, I suppose. All the streets look like this now – dirt and grit and sand and ash. It's what you would expect from late March, perhaps, before the last nasty blow puts another pillow over your heart and waits for your hopes to stop kicking. But now? It can’t last. We know it.

I wonder if spring and summer will lift the national mood. Can't hurt. But I think we're in for a year of long faces. Then again, I was kicking myself looking at stocks today. If I'd bought GE when it was five bucks a month or so ago, I would have doubled my money. Of course, if I'd bought Sirius at some point in the past, I'd be looking at the Official State of Bupkis; they declared bankruptcy today. That doesn't seem to be the right word, declared; sounds a bit too loud-and-proud, as if the CEO went on the roof of the building and shouted HEAR YE, HEAR YE. “Admitted bankruptcy in tones that brought to mind the wet, flatulent sound of air escaping a deflated balloon” is more like it.
I have Sirius now, against my will. They got peanut-butter on my XM chocolate, and we all know what’s in PB these days. I don’t know if this means I have Howard Stern somewhere in my radio, and I don’t care; for all the laudations heaped on his head by those who cite his brave, brash, pull-no-punches style, I am never forget the day when I am heading to the airport in New York, and the limo driver has Howard on the radio. Stern had a caller who was angered by something he’d said – big surprise – and it turned out she was from Africa. She spoke lovely English with that African lilt. Stern kept asking her if she ate monkeys. ‘Cause that’s why we have AIDS.

Satellite radio is wonderful, though, and I would hate to lose it. The naughty comedy channel got worse since the merger – it’s now “Rawdog,” whatever the hell that means, and features more interviews with comedians. Because that’s what I want from a stand-up channel: insights into the fascinating psyches of these misanthropic, infantile, self-absorbed – but funny! – buttheads. Fewer actual stand-up comics. To be fair the other day I heard Gilbert Gottfried deliver the most concentratedly offensive line I’d ever heard, and I almost drove off the road. It doesn’t work unless he says it, unless you see him squinting, hear him yelling it. Shortly thereafter – and this much be the corrosive effect of this channel – I had a thought which would have been a career-ender for a journalist, but a huge applause line for a stand-up.

No, I won’t repeat it.

The old-time-radio channel is in the same place, but I could live without that. I drive around with a year’s worth of old radio on my Nano, and it has album art, too. This was something I kvetched about on Twitter the other day – most of the album art attached to Old Time Radio shows is just hideous. This, for example, appears to be the default for the excellent Orson Welles show, “The Third Man.”
Jaaay-bus. Here's my replacement. Nothing special, but it is different:

For Dragnet, I was playing around with this:
I still like it – the iconic Webb mug with the show's name stripped across his eyes like dark glasses, or something to obscure his identity. But no. Used it for another Jack Webb show. Stick with the classics:

That's a recreation of the TV show credits, not a frame grab. One day I'll put them all up as a page for everyone! And one day I will . . . oh, I don't know. Buy GE.

Up today: a nice big update to the Minneapolis site; Out of Context Ad Contest; Miscreant Round-up at buzz.mn later today.
34 RESPONSES TO *Wednesday, Feb. 11*

**Poagao** says:
February 11, 2009 at 1:39 am

The only ever new car my parents bought when I was growing up was a baby-blue 1973 Pinto “Squire” wagon with fake wood paneling. It was a kind of rebellion I guess, as we were A Buick Family.

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**hnkn** says:
February 11, 2009 at 5:44 am

Re: “Rawdog”

I feel exactly the same way. The profusion of ads for products promising “enhanced male performance” and others of a similarly upscale nature always made me a little squeamish about the XM channel. But now they’ve added that dreadful name, “Rawdog” (and the accompanying sound effects) which, together with the ads, really makes me feel like I’m a shmoe for listening to the station. It seems that the audience is supposed to be out of work, heavily indebted, male-underperforming mouth breathers who chortle at the dirty words. Somehow, I don’t think that is the brand identity the marketers were going for. I listen less as a result.

My wife tells me, however, and my cursory listening confirms, that the 80s station has gotten much better since the merger.

---

**Karla Duffy** says:
February 11, 2009 at 6:12 am

Howard Stern, an 80′s waste of skin. Like most Congresspersons, makes me almost ashamed to be Human.

But then – we have Mr. B, the apex of all we CAN be. Rest in peace, Sir, we are better having had you among us.

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**Michael Rittenhouse** says:
February 11, 2009 at 6:16 am

Just lately, Squeeky and I paid to see a comic we’d enjoyed on “Last Comic Standing.” What we didn’t take into account was, he’d edited himself for television.

I think, since about 1970, we’ve had too few writers and too many comics. So, onstage, most go gutter, mistaking embarrassed laughter for the real thing.

The audiences don’t seem to make the distinction, either.

---

**hpoulter** says:
February 11, 2009 at 6:28 am

OTRR hasn’t posted their CD sets of “the Third Man” on the Internet Archive yet, so maybe it’s a work in progress. With X Minus One and Johnny Dollar, for instance, they provide a set of alternate covers you can choose from, on the last CD-sized zip (14 of 14 for YTJD). I like the choices on both of those shows – I use a tough-looking picture of Bob Bailey for YTJD.

Of course, the OTRR is an all-volunteer effort, so some of their...
projects are executed better than others.

V the K says:
February 11, 2009 at 6:32 am

Not surprised Sirius went belly-up. I let my subscription expire after 1 year with the new automobile. I expected to be bombarded with offers and discounts to retain my custom. Nope. One half-hearted pitch by snail-mail about three months later, offering no discount over the basic rate. Ridiculous. The hardware is installed, the satellite broadcasts whether I listen or not. You would think getting *something* was better than nothing since the capital costs had already been sunk, but, no.

hpoulter says:
February 11, 2009 at 6:35 am

As for Sirius – it's that bastid Mel Karmazin – the “genius” who helped destroy regular FM radio with his top-down one-size-fits-all formatic approach to programming, then destroyed Sirius by paying Stern half a BILLION dollars, on the assumption that all Howard fans would rush out and get Sirius subscriptions (which they didn't) and now is dragging XM radio under. What a menace.

Nancy says:
February 11, 2009 at 7:25 am

I am always struck by the depth of some of the “normal” people around us. Turns out this friend's dad—“He was one of those men who was old when I was a kid, and I mean old old. “—had reason to be so sober. And it seems he was quite intelligent as well. God rest his soul…

Pat Berry says:
February 11, 2009 at 7:59 am

I haven't been tempted to sign up for Sirius/XM — or the audio book subscription plans from Audible.com, for that matter — for one simple reason: I have no available time to listen to them. I do listen to audio content when I'm driving, walking for exercise, or doing mindless tasks like preparing meals or sorting laundry, but it's all podcasts, including The Diner.

That's right, James. YOU killed Sirius. Congratulations!

V the K says:
February 11, 2009 at 8:16 am

There's also the silly business of the 'Activation Fee.' $39 to have a technician enter a code into a computer; a thirty-second activity. Ridiculous. Sure, they offered to waive it, but why have it in the first place?

Kevin Buchanan says:
February 11, 2009 at 8:42 am

“I am never forget the day...”

Thanks. A good Lehrer reference makes my day, sometimes.
Alec says:
February 11, 2009 at 8:56 am

Oh come on, if you have something funny to say, you have to share it with the world. Cursing doesn't matter. I don't have kids. I'm post-swearing.

Dan says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:06 am

GE at $5? I see the 52 week low as $10.66. Of course I bought it at $18 and thought I was getting a bargain, so what do I know...

Brian Tiemann says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:17 am

Start up another secret blog to hold all the things you refuse to speak in public here. Stuff that's too apolitical for the Screedblog and too blue for the Bleat. The Blueeat.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:20 am

“God rest his brave soul.”

Yes, bless them all. Lost my Dad in 05. Marine – in at 16, turned 18 invading Okinawa. Never talked about combat, just his buddies. After the War, he joined the Air Force, and flew in old B25 Mitchells. Met dozens just like him. Common setting: Bowling Alley with one too many beers consumed. All gone, or going. God rest all of their brave souls.

Satellite Radio: Had it in the Rental car for the past week. ASISOT, interesting to the point of distraction, but I can live without it. Fascinated by the variety, but oggied out when I found the Playboy channel programmed in as one of the presets right before I turned it in. I certainly hope a female had programed that in ('cause that would make it better in my own mind), and not some dude at the rental place, or one of the previous renters. Scary, & Creepy=Creepy.

sourcreamus says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:25 am

Jack Webb looks like a grown up Alfred E Neuman in that picture.

Bonnie_ says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:28 am

God rest his soul. He probably hasn't finished drinking toasts with all his friends, and won't for years to come.

My Dad opens up about his WWII experiences with my kids. Never with me, but with them. There's something safer about telling grandkids stories, I think. I lurked in the kitchen one day and heard him telling them about how he loved garbage duty aboard the submarine, because as soon as you came up top the fins of dozens of huge sharks would crest out of the water. They followed the ship, and if you slipped while throwing garbage there was no do-over.

I hope your friend's father told his stories to someone. I wish I could
hear his stories myself.

jejischen says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:32 am

Thank you for posting Mr. Bakken's obit. I try to peruse as many obits as possible in the state daily, partly because I used to write them and partly because you occasionally come across one, such as Mr. Bakken's, that stands out. While many vets had mundane jobs in the service, some veteran's obits read like an excerpt from a thrilling action novel. Too bad there are so few WWII vets left. I hope someone got their stories down before they passed.

Al Federber says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:37 am

I don't know about video-taping so much of your kid's activities. I had a strange dream not long ago in which I had discovered a newly-discovered 8mm reel of myself as a young child. My parents were in it as well, but I had no memory of the film being made and had never seen it before.

Nothing dramatic or bad happened in the film, but the revelation of what I and my family were really like, as opposed to my lifelong impressions, was shocking. It was like watching strangers who had our faces, yet it was all undeniably true. Most unsettling.

Gibbering Madness says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:53 am

Sigh. Would I that it were Lileks himself producing podcasted radio shows – I'll bet an anthology series like "Lights Out" edited by our Esteemed Host would be great, or a noirish detective series (rather grittier than the originals in the 1940s-1950s, I would imagine).

I actually wrote him a letter once suggesting that he produce Lance Lawson podcast radio shorts.

Baby M says:
February 11, 2009 at 9:59 am

I had a free trial subscription to Sirius with my new VW. I let it lapse because, while the sat radio was nice, it wasn't nice enough to pay for. If I spent six hours a day on the road, I might've felt different.

Chrees says:
February 11, 2009 at 10:02 am

I am in awe at what the older generations went through. After my father's funeral last summer I talked with some of the men who had also been in WW II about their experiences. You could tell they were holding a lot back, but even some of the everyday experiences were fascinating.

Regarding old-time radio, I preferred Sirius' Classic Radio format to XM's (my car had Sirius, my wife's XM before the merge). It was much more predictable as to what was coming on and many times would play through an entire series before changing time slots or shows. Oh well, still happy I'm able to listen to it.

For those that have downloaded old shows, are there any preferred
sites? There's obviously the big advertiser on satellite, but I didn't know if there were others…

**hpoulter** says:
February 11, 2009 at 10:10 am

Chrees – if you want to download old-time radio shows for free, there is no better place to start than the Internet Archive:

http://www.archive.org/details/oldtimeradio

They can keep you busy for a loooong time.

**GardenStater** says:
February 11, 2009 at 10:22 am

My PC is being balky today, and wouldn’t pull up the obit. I hope to read it soon.

Dad joined the Merchant Marine in 1944, as soon as he graduated high school, at the age of 17(!). I’ve got a 15-year-old son, and it's REALLY hard to imagine him going to sea in 2 years. Wow.

Anyway, thank God for my grandmother (God rest her soul; she passed away many years ago at 94). She not only saved my granddad's diary from 1917-1920, but also ALL my dad's letters written home during his stint at sea. What a treasure!

Dad was a radio operator (as his dad had been in the previous war) on board several ships, and went from the small town of Canajoharie, NY (where he'd spent his entire life) to South America, the North Atlantic, Europe, etc, etc. We read in his letters home about lots of things, including the starving children of Europe (!) and all sorts of crazy adventures.

Two stories Dad has shared with us: During his time in the North Atlantic, the German U-boats were still doing lots of damage. They picked up one sailor who had had 3 ships shot out from under him in less than 24 hours. The Merchant Marine lost more men, percentage-wise, than the USMC. And these guys didn't have any guns on board!

The other story is only funny because of the result:

Dad was working the night shift in the radio shack (you always wondered where that name came from, didn’t you?). The head (bathroom for you land-lubbers) was too far away, and he couldn’t leave the radio unattended for too long, for fear of missing an important message. But nature called on one stormy night. Dad left the radio shack, and walked a few feet to the ship's rail to relieve himself over the side. A huge swell came up, and he was nearly knocked overboard! Since it was the middle of the night, nobody would have noticed his absence for hours afterwards. Fortunately, his young reflexes were good enough that he was able to grab the rail and hold on. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be writing this right now!

God bless all those boys who saved the world…if you see a WWII vet, please shake his hand and thank him.

**GardenStater** says:
February 11, 2009 at 10:24 am

P.S. Dad's still around. He'll turn 82 this June 19th.
(Mom will turn 79 in May. And yes, I’m grateful for long-lived grandparents and parents!)

DryOwlTacos says:
February 11, 2009 at 10:30 am

Mr. Bakken certainly had a remarkable life. I was interested to note that he had worked for the Western Company in Midland, Texas. Back in the late 60s/early 70s, they had a TV ad campaign with the classic tagline, spoken by a comely lass in a miniskirt: “If you don’t have an oil well, get one! You’ll love doing business with Western!”

Wisconsinite says:
February 11, 2009 at 10:33 am

I saw Howard Stern on late night tv once. I don’t get it. He had a midget on who was so drunk he couldn’t talk and also what was probably the ugliest Prostitute in New York who he kept insulting.

Entertainment for stupid people I guess.

Rightfromthestart says:
February 11, 2009 at 10:38 am

As another result of corrosive rotten ’60’s, today we cannot even imagine a college professor who was also a war hero. Simply unthinkable

Glenn says:
February 11, 2009 at 11:05 am

In an ideal world, I would love to know more of the details of Mr. Bakken’s journey from Stalag III-C to Odessa (of all places!). We often skip over things like that, but making that journey in 1945 fascinates me. What was it like? What did he see? What did he eat? Were the Russians “nice”? Then, when they say he “made his way back to the U.S.” how did he come? It’s a very trees-instead-of-forest way of looking at things, but it’s also so illuminating.

Chrees says:
February 11, 2009 at 12:16 pm

hpoulter — many thanks!

Ed Singel says:
February 11, 2009 at 2:54 pm

I agree that the Rawdog channel on XM is not as good as XM Comedy was. However, a new channel has appeared on XM called Blue Collar Comedy (also uncensored, on ch 148) that carries similar standup, including many good comedians I would not classify as “blue collar”. I find that by switching between these two channels I can usually find something good.

Tim Collins says:
February 11, 2009 at 3:04 pm

Hard to hear your dad in tears. I recall vividly my grandfather in tears—and he was a hard enough man in his prime—over fear of
death. I'll never forget that one.

You are a churchgoer, I gather from past Bleats. A truly innocent, curious question: What do you think happens after death? (And to whom?)

I'll put my cards on the table—I'll buy what the Bible says on the matter, though I won't know til it's too late, or the party's just begun. But it's a topic which doesn't get talked about til something like the death of a friend's dad.

Thanks as always for your writing! It's a real joy, and I share it often with friends.

**Abby says:**
February 11, 2009 at 5:09 pm

Not to butt in with an untimely comment, but I was reading the comments to another post here a while ago and saw someone mention an RSS feed for the Bleat... is it true?

If so, could someone point it out to me? I can't seem to locate it.

**Mikey NTH says:**
February 11, 2009 at 6:43 pm

The warmth has removed the ice from our pavements also. And for that I am glad. Heavy rain this morning – we need that in late March to wash the last of winter's dirt away.

I look forward to the spring.
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

MORE
Thanks for dropping by!
Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
As much as I would love to go on, and on, and on today, I'm up against a batch of deadlines, and tomorrow is one of those mornings front-loaded with duties. But we'll have a big Polish Money update, and of course it's Lance Lawson Thursday over at buzz.mn.

Interesting: 25 years ago, it would have been expected to note that there was something stupid about Polish money – like, I don't know, it had dotted lines so you could cut it up for change. Why? Because the Polish were stupid, hyuk hyuk. This may have been the last gasp of acceptable ethnic humor, buried by the serenely ignorant remarks of Archie Bunker. Why, once we saw ourselves reflected in his flagrant bigotry, we turned away in shame!

Maybe. But no one makes Polish jokes anymore. I couldn't figure out why they were made in the first place, but at some point they were awarded the Idiot Sash, and that was it. This was the early 70s, too – had we been swamped by thick Polish immigrants recently? No. Did anyone have any actual evidence to back up the joke? No. Not that it matters; the Polish Person in the story was an interchangeable moron from a culture of morons, and the only reason they work is because the Poland had no previous cultural identity. (They were briefly accorded the status of Romantic Oppressed People in WW2, with a government in exile and aristocrats swapping the monocle and champagne glass for the bomb-sight and the rudder stick, but that didn't last.)
Everyone else had a broad cliche. The French are sensualists, the Italians are excitable. The Spanish: languorous. The Swiss: precise. The Belgians are stolid, the British are eccentric, the Greek are . . . dancey-drinky-types who love life and smell of fish, the Eastern Europeans are all Counts or Vampires. The Polish had no such tag.

I’m just guessing; this isn’t intended to be a Theory. Unless it’s picked up by others and expanded upon, in which case, yes, this is the theory that is mine, by James Lileks, brackets Mister brackets.

Look for the money around noon or so; Lance up at buzz.mn.

34 RESPONSES TO thursday, feb. 12

rico says:
February 12, 2009 at 12:39 am

I once had a French girlfriend who asked me why Americans tell Polack jokes– she was baffled, as in Europe the Poles have a reputation as a nation of scientists and intellectuals and philosophers and warriors (she said). I had no reason other than yours, the no-readily-handly-stereotype thing, and asked her, well, in France if you want to tell a joke about people who are stupid and dirty, who takes that role? She gave me the 80s equivalent of a duh and said “the Belgians, of course”. I guess stolid doesn’t quite capture their flavor in France.

Steve Ripley says:
February 12, 2009 at 2:41 am

Fiend! I just wasted 20 minutes watching one Python bit after another. It's addicting (and yet rather shameful.)
Baby M says:
February 12, 2009 at 5:08 am

I believe that a certain Lech Walesa is the reason nobody tells Polish jokes anymore.

Trish says:
February 12, 2009 at 6:09 am

Every country must have this same phenomenon. In Canada we have Newfie jokes. Basically Polish jokes with the word Newfie substituted and sprinkled liberally with words like ‘bye (boy) and references to fish!

Polish jokes still abound, believe me, the best ones I get from my friend Wojtek Trzinski. Poles and Newfies have the best jokes about themselves (and even better ones about us)!

dimestore lipstick says:
February 12, 2009 at 7:02 am

I always blamed the Germans for the derogatory term, and for kicking off the jokes. The German translation for butt is “po” and the translation for hole is “loch”.

Please, don’t attack me–I’m of German descent myself, and my husband is Polish.

Cambias says:
February 12, 2009 at 7:12 am

Lech Walesa, Pope John Paul II, Poland’s key role in the downfall of the Soviet empire — not much to laugh at, really.

Mike Gebert says:
February 12, 2009 at 7:32 am

I’m sure Polish jokes dated back to the influx of Eastern Europeans into the midwest industrial areas like Chicago. Before that, it was Bohunks (bohemian/Hungarian) as the stereotype of greenhorns overseas.

But then, as I posted in 2000 (and got picked up around the internut):

Final score for the 20th century:
Ordinary Poles, 2
German intellectuals, 0

Tough to make fun of a people whose examples are JPII and Lech Walesa.

Topics about Humoristic and Funny stuff » Archive » Thursday, Feb. 12 says:
February 12, 2009 at 7:37 am

[...] iPrissy.com put an intriguing blog post on Thursday, Feb. 12Here’s a quick excerptThis may have been the last gasp of acceptable ethnic Bhumor/B, buried by the serenely ignorant remarks of Archie Bunker. [...]

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=914
ajtooley says:
February 12, 2009 at 7:49 am

It's my unfortunate duty to inform you, James, that here in Montana we tell North Dakotan jokes instead of Polish jokes. Same jokes, of course.

When I visited Bavaria in the early 80s, the teenagers with whom I hung out would delight in telling me Ost Frisian jokes. No doubt the Ost Frisians told Dane jokes.

Then there was my Roman History professor who told us of the graffito he'd seen that started out “There was a Roman, a Greek and an Etruscan...”

Robert says:
February 12, 2009 at 8:13 am

Polish jokes came into vogue in the early days of World War II, when the Poles bravely defended themselves against the Germans. There was a brief window where a few Poles thought they could win, and bragged about it – earning their nation's gallantry a somewhat humiliating counterpoint, the assumption that they must all be idiots – brave, but stupid. The jokes were extremely popular for a few months, before the French were defeated even more soundly, and it didn't seem quite so funny anymore. The residual Poles=stupid meme has been coasting from that brief golden age ever since.

Lars Walker says:
February 12, 2009 at 8:27 am

The best ethnic jokes are about Swedes. I speak as a Norwegian.

Sviliuppo says:
February 12, 2009 at 8:39 am

I'd always heard that the jokes arose in the US during the first half of the 20th century. Out of the many ethnic groups coming to the US, many of the Poles had great language skills, fluent in Polish, Russian, German, French, and sometimes Hebrew. English wasn't popular back in the home country, and picking up a fourth or fifth language when you're older is difficult, contributing to a narrow American view of Poles as stupid or easily confused.

The chain of Dutch-Belgian-French jokes is pretty interesting.

MikeH says:
February 12, 2009 at 8:43 am

I remember there were a few books published with ethnic jokes, tehy were double sided, on one side was polish jokes, the other side was italian jokes. There were several different books of different nationalities. I doubt they would ever be able to publish these today.

swschrad says:
February 12, 2009 at 8:47 am

Iowa jokes, of course. and cheeseers.
and lawyers.

“What do you call a bus full of ( ) that drives off a cliff.”

would you believe… spam?

**Moishe3rd** says:
February 12, 2009 at 8:54 am

Off the top o’ me head, I would suspect that Polish jokes were the result of the Jews being The Entertainment Business.
If true, then Jewish comedians would have certainly promulgated a lot more Polish jokes than any other ethnicity in terms of Poles being stupid, no?
I mean, they couldn’t really call the Germans “stupid,” but the Poles?
I think they would have been a natural butt of Jewish ill feeling.
Their country was invaded and conquered; they were murdered and considered subhuman by the Germans and yet, they cheerfully turned over their entire population of Jews, the largest on the planet at that time, to the Nazis.
Which, offhand, seems fairly stupid to me…

**DrBear** says:
February 12, 2009 at 9:39 am

I dunno, in NE Wisconsin we used to tell Belgian jokes.

Nice Python reference.

**David C** says:
February 12, 2009 at 9:41 am

Hmm, Robert may be correct about the WWII origins. Part of the still-lingering (but false) mythology of the German invasion of Poland is the notion that Polish cavalry tried to charge German Panzers with lances. (They did indeed still *have* cavalry, as did most WWII powers, but ’30s cavalry was basically just a sort of mobile infantry that fought dismounted as a general rule.)

When I was a kid, there was a peculiar “flip book” in the house: on one side, it was Polish jokes. Flip it over, and it was Italian jokes. As a little kid, I knew little about either Italians or Poles, but it was obvious that the jokes were essentially interchangeable.

**Gray Hackle** says:
February 12, 2009 at 9:45 am

Here in Georgia, it's Alabama jokes. Heck, we even go down to bashing the adjoining county with jokes about how dumb and hick-like they are.

**Brit** says:
February 12, 2009 at 9:49 am

We used to tell these as Irish jokes, but that's no longer considered PC so sadly George W Bush fills the void.

**David C** says:
February 12, 2009 at 9:52 am

Wikipedia actually has some great stuff on the mythology of Polish
cavalry charges… There actually *were* some, and they were mostly successful!

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_cavalry#Cavalry_charges_and_propaganda

But both German and Soviet propaganda pushed the “stupid Poles charging panzers with lances” angle.

It's also worth noting that a lot of the mythology about Italian incompetence and cowardice in WWII was the result of effective British propaganda. Italy had a lot of incompetent “leadership”, but their soldiers fought well, generally. There were mass surrenders in North Africa, to be sure, but if, like the Italians, you’re a non-motorized force cut off from supplies (e.g., WATER), there aren’t many other options….

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 12, 2009 at 10:15 am

I still get a laugh out of the name “Ann Elk”

There was a pair of Hungarian brothers who did photography in our hometown (Santa Maria, CA). they had escaped Hungary during one of the Soviet crack downs post WWII. They very sincerely told of how stupid Russians were, I could not tell if they were ethnic “jokes” or straight out beliefs. Can’t really blame them for not liking Russians.

To show that racism and ethnic insensitivity is not the monopoly of any one group of people. Many of the older Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in my hometown told “Okie” jokes. I had one older neighbor helping with a fence when I was about 12 say “you hold that hammer like an Okie.”

I did not say anything but, my mother’s side of the family is from Oklahoma.

tomindenver says:
February 12, 2009 at 10:32 am

Growing up in a rural area, (ok it was Nebraska) we had no Polish-Americans to make fun of so we had to make up something else and used Bohemians (Not the artsy type, people from Bohemia). Television has now progressed to using dads as the butt of the dumb jokes.

Jeff says:
February 12, 2009 at 11:28 am

Blond jokes seemed to have taken the place of Polish jokes. And then they were in turn replaced by Redneck jokes.

Currently Democratic Congresscriters seem to be in the running to replace the Rednecks.

Bilwick says:
February 12, 2009 at 11:37 am

“Why, then the Polack will never defend it . . . ”

HAMLET, Act IV, Scene IV
shesnailie says:
February 12, 2009 at 12:11 pm

_@_v – all i know about ethnic stereotypes is that the spanish are very inquisitive…

Brian Lutz says:
February 12, 2009 at 12:55 pm

Of course, most of this stuff has more recently been recycled into college rivalry jokes, which is presumably a bit more politically correct than the IYFEG (Insert Your Favorite Ethnic Group) approach.

shinumo says:
February 12, 2009 at 1:14 pm

Yes, Brian, the Spanish are very inquisitive, but nobody expects it.

KenB says:
February 12, 2009 at 1:19 pm

Read “A question of honor : the Kosciuszko Squadron : the forgotten heroes of World War II”. In the middle of the book it explains the origin of Polish Jokes.

DryOwlTacos says:
February 12, 2009 at 2:10 pm

@Brian Lutz: Of course, most of this stuff has more recently been recycled into college rivalry jokes, which is presumably a bit more politically correct than the IYFEG (Insert Your Favorite Ethnic Group) approach.

In Texas, it's Aggies. They're the all-purpose jokebutt, and it seems to be a matter of pride actually to BE one. One example: What do you call an Aggie a year after graduation? Boss!

Karla Duffy says:
February 12, 2009 at 3:55 pm

Won't repeat what previous commenters have said (from Montana, lived in Texas & Nebraska & a few others, am 1/4 Norwegian, 1/4 Belgian, with the rest sorta Heinz 57), but must add to the Canadians joking about Newfies – as a teenager I lived in Alberta for 3 years & most of the jokes there were Yanks (by which they meant Easterners) or Ukrainians, with a Newfie joke or three thrown in by some people who moved from Ontario.

Kevin says:
February 12, 2009 at 11:09 pm

As I kid I heard and told “Polack” jokes for years without even knowing what a Polack was, or that it had anything to do with Poland or people therefrom.

It was just sort of an empty word, like when people say “Jew ‘im down on the price” without having any idea they are referring to Jews. Fortunately I learned about THAT one before I ever met any Jewish people.
Heh, a few years ago at a lunch table full of co-workers, one guy was bragging about “Jewing someone down” on the price of the house he bought, and — totally aghast — I leaned over to my lovely Jewish co-worker and whispered “Trust me, he has no idea what he just said!”

Jay says:
February 13, 2009 at 2:13 am

“Thereir country was invaded and conquered; they were murdered and considered subhuman by the Germans and yet, they cheerfully turned over their entire population of Jews, the largest on the planet at that time, to the Nazis.

Which, offhand, seems fairly stupid to me…”

Perhaps the Holocaust has some lesson for us w/ regard to making sweeping statements about what “they” did without citing any support.

Gray Hackle says:
February 13, 2009 at 8:03 am

I had a Jewish friend who had a litany of the best ‘Jewish Princess’ jokes memorized. He always said the best ones came from Jewish men. They knew their subject.

Jaytee says:
February 13, 2009 at 1:59 pm

After being bombarded by Polish jokes as a 10 year old boy, I stupidly vowed that the only ethnic group I’d never marry was a Pole. How’d that work out? My kids are half Polish.

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3: Black & White World
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WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! [...]

MORE
Thanks for dropping by!
Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Early in the evening I collected all the recyclable stuff and put it in the bins. I did not take the bins outside. I looked at the bins, thinking: if I do this now, I won’t have to do it later, when I’m tired, when it’s colder, when the neighbors will be asleep. It will be done, and I’ll be able to perform all the other evening details – making Natalie’s lunch, setting up the coffee, neatening and straightening so the kitchen is clean and orderly for the morning. That would be the smart thing to do.

Yes, it certainly would.

I left the bins in the furnace room and went upstairs.

Everything you need to know about human nature can probably be found in that anecdote. I’m not saying I encompass all of human nature, I contain multitudes, etc., but for every person who takes it out right away there’s one of me, maybe more: people who arrange everything to the brink of completion then back off, having done enough for the moment. Those bags in the basement were the equivalent of a blue-ribbon panel on subprime mortgages in 2005.

This is the modern world, as the Jam said in ancient times: had to produce a small video segment about Lincoln’s birthday. (Not available online at the moment, but that’s another story.) Writing it was easy, but I needed some visuals that we’re boring shots of Abe looking grave and gigantic, or some sepia photo where he looks like he’s dealing with one of those echoey,
metallic hangovers. So I figured I'd get some Trek. Ah, but how to hoover up video from Hulu? Can't. So I shot the screen and converted that. Put it up; noted later on twitter that getting Trek Lincoln into the workday was my major accomplishment so far . . . when led, a few hours later, to a tweet from Abraham Lincoln, noting how interesting it had been to be reincarnated and fighting alongside Kirk and Spock.

The world has become fictional. I'm not only getting messages through the ether from dead presidents, but dead presidents referring to their adventures in the future on another planet with characters from a 1960s TV show. How I love it. But really, think about it – we used to have a rather bright hard line between Real and Fictional. Most people dreamed of the fictional in their waking hours, either by seeing a movie or reading a magazine or drifting off into a reverie about Dale Arden. But now we live in “Purple Rose of Cairo” – characters step off the screen all the time. Granted, they set up blogs instead of taking us out to dinner, but you can say the same thing about most people you know.

That was not the only accomplishment for the day; also shot some gripping footage of retail signs downtown. It's been a few months since I've walked around downtown, and I expected more empty storefronts in the skyway. There are a few; one small place that sold expensive baby clothes was gone, as was an outpost of a small coffee-and-tea chain that died within the last few months. Pity; they had arts-and-crafts interiors, but that's not enough. It should be more than enough – I'm tired of the vague, carefully tasteful, placeless hip of Starbucks. It's a stage set, nothing more, and whenever I go there I never feel like I have the right script.

Otherwise, the stores were still there. Heads still need to be trimmed, gullets need to be filled. Passed a Taco Bell that was open for business at 10:30 AM, and appeared to be manned by a psychopathic killer: he stood behind the counter gripping the till like the wheel of a truck he planned to drive through a bank's front window. Everything about him shouted I'M DOING THIS SO I DON'T HAVE TO LIE TO MY PAROLE OFFICER. MUCH. You could almost read his mind as he surveyed the prospective customers. C'mon, c'mon. Hit me. HIT ME.

Traffic's always light in the middle of the morning. The skyways are quiet, aside from the obligatory fellow cell-yelling for all to hear. I noted one lunatic, who was speaking softly to himself, drawing patterns in the air with his index finger as he walked along, smiling the happiness of someone who sees things we don't, knows them to be true, and likes what he knows. I suppose some people hear voices that tell them to be nice to dogs, admire the grain of the granite, take pleasure in the crunch of the sand under your shoes as you walk along the filthy streets. Not everyone mad is furious. There are some people out there whose heads are full of people, but they're the Hillside Singers.

Hated to leave the skyways – the wind comes around corners like a mob with one thing on its mind. Hard to see how your shot looks when your eyes have
teared up. On the way back I took a route I used to walk every other day, noting with the usual uselessness that there used to be a McGlynn’s bakery there. So WHAT. For heaven’s sake, it was there for four years, two decades ago. Let it die. (Update: it did.) (Don’t look at me! I bought donuts from them. Bread, too.) Made my way back to the office without thinking about anything – where I was going, what I was doing, where I should turn. It’s all automatic.

The desire for something new is immediately met by the knowledge that I would miss the familiar. Indulgent, bathetic personal nostalgia being one of my more pervasive failings, I know that the former has more merit than the latter; I really should get more new things in my life. New places. One of the most appealing ideas about a new city, actually, is the realization that I could investigate all sorts sorts of bygone history, and have an entirely new set of bygone things to miss.

Went home after I’d concluded the Strib duties, wrote a column, uploaded it, then took Natalie and friend to Subway before Karate class. Amused them both by dropping a meatball in my lap. Well, there’s no harm in being the cheerful funny cool dad, is there? Work on it for ten years, and hope some day a peer says “well, your dad’s not that much of a loser” when the inevitable teen rant pours forth.

This sign amused me: it’s English, but filtered through rapidly hardening concrete.
Later today: oh, I don't know. I may get the comic ads out; I will probably get 100 Mysteries up by the evening time. More duties and another column – but it's Friday! Huzzah, and all that.

Column is HERE – somewhere. Scroll down & look for my mug. Is that so hard? I didn't think so. And thanks! Oh, one more thing – fear & superstition thread over at buzz.mn. See you as soon as possible.

---

UNTOLD RICHES AWAIT YOU

This is just a fragment of the site, you know. Head HERE for the full menu. Enjoy!

BLEAT PREMIUM

Go HERE to join - for as little as you like. You'll get an email with your passwords. The page for your bonus-secret ulta links is HERE!

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22 RESPONSES TO friday the thirteenth

rhhardin says:
February 13, 2009 at 4:37 am

Kroger has a lot of English composition struggle signs pic1
pic2 which doesn't get the actual logic quite right even after the struggle.

Topics about Humoristic and Funny stuff » Archive » Friday the Thirteenth says:
February 13, 2009 at 6:30 am

 [...] Junlee presents...time to jump into the real world! created an interesting post today on Friday the Thirteenth.Here's a short outline.Early in the evening I collected all the recyclable Bstuff/B and put it in the ... Well, there's no harm in being the cheerful Bfunny/B cool dad, is... [...] 

ladyjaye75 says:
February 13, 2009 at 6:51 am

Had an argument last week with a Subway manager about whether the chicken ranch with bacon sub constituted a sub with extra bacon or not (my argument: if it's listed as a sub on the menu, it isn't; his: because there is a chicken ranch without bacon on the menu, the one with bacon is extra).

So we ended up having to pay extra for the bacon... but the manager (who had to follow his district manager's rules) was sweet enough to give me two free cookies.

Cuneo says:
February 13, 2009 at 8:14 am

What I don't understand about the Subway five dollar footlong special is that they list the meatball marinara sub for five dollars, but on the wall menu it's something like $4.79. Do the mean five dollars or less? Maybe I'll order one today and find out.

Brian Greenberg says:
February 13, 2009 at 8:40 am

Last time they did the “all footlongs for $5” promotion, I had to fight with a subway worker to get a 6" sub. She kept saying, “take the footlong – it’s only $5!” And I kept saying, “I don’t WANT a footlong, I want a 6" sub!” Eventually, believe it or not, she won the argument, and I wound up eating twice as much for dinner as I wanted to that night.

Don’t any of these folks remember that Jared & friends have been driving us all to Subway as a way to take off a few pounds? How does forcing me into eating two sandwiches at a time get me there, exactly?

John says:
February 13, 2009 at 8:49 am

I could have used that sign during the last promotion. I ordered the foot long cheesesteak (way too much food anyway) and the cashier rang it up at something like $9.25. Apparently it wasn't included in the promotion, though I couldn't see any signage to that effect. I paid it to avoid a scene during the lunch rush and ate the damn thing (again, way too much food). But I also haven't been back since.

Take that Subway #34817!
MikeH says:
February 13, 2009 at 9:15 am

I've never bothered with the promo cause I know the kind of sandwich I want would not fall under the deal. Also with Subway's sandwich's, I can eat two foot longs, loaded with stuff, after 2 hours I feel so hungry like I hadn't eaten all day. I feel like I wasted my money.

rafinlay says:
February 13, 2009 at 9:44 am

Being a major fan of NOT eating at Subway, I have a permanent exemption from all of their promotional confusions.

Leslie in AZ says:
February 13, 2009 at 10:07 am

Your description of the Taco Bell worker made me spew my tea! 😁
(still laughing)

Steven says:
February 13, 2009 at 10:33 am

“Oh, I noted one lunatic, who was speaking softly to himself, drawing patterns in the air with his index finger as he walked along, smiling the happiness of someone who sees things we don’t, knows them to be true, and likes what he knows.”

Or maybe he was just filming one of those annoying Bud Light “drinkability” commercials.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
February 13, 2009 at 10:42 am

“I left the bins in the furnace room and went upstairs.”

Methinks you were hearing the Imp of the Perverse.

Neil says:
February 13, 2009 at 11:25 am

“It's a stage set, nothing more, and whenever I go there I never feel like I have the right script.”

I know exactly what you mean.

So are you a Dunkin' Doughnuts guy then? With a pink + orange interior, they must be selling coffee rather than “lifestyle”.

Karl says:
February 13, 2009 at 11:42 am

“(T)he wind comes around corners like a mob with one thing on its mind.”

Stop. You're making the other writers look bad.
M Geiger says:
February 13, 2009 at 12:33 pm

“Scroll down & look for my mug. Is that so hard?”

FYI:
It is when it never shows up. At least today your byline was under “More Columnists”, usually I have to conduct a search if I want to read your columns.

hnkn says:
February 13, 2009 at 12:58 pm

@ rhhardin:

I don’t see what is wrong with the logic in picture 2. Have I missed something?

Brian Lutz says:
February 13, 2009 at 3:04 pm

*What I don’t understand about the Subway five dollar footlong special is that they list the meatball marinara sub for five dollars, but on the wall menu it’s something like $4.79. Do the mean five dollars or less? Maybe I’ll order one today and find out.*

There are probably places where the 12-inch meatball costs more than $5. I ran into a similar incident not too long ago where there was a KFC coupon that would have actually made the item cost MORE than the menu price:


rhhardin says:
February 13, 2009 at 5:18 pm

*I don’t see what is wrong with the logic in picture 2. Have I missed something?*

They wanted that any residual, after multiples of 4 are charged at 4/$11, are charged at $3 each.

They said that more than 4 are charged at $3 each.

GardenStater says:
February 13, 2009 at 6:23 pm

Not to brag, but here in North Jersey, we have an overabundance of great pizzerias and delis that serve WAY better subs than Subway ever dreamed of. The only time I’ve bought something from a Subway was when I was on the Interstate and didn’t have any other choice.

Oh, and we have great bagels, too. But I make my own at home, so I don’t even usually buy those!

(Lord, I’ve become as insufferable as Lance Lawson!)

KBBoom says:
February 14, 2009 at 7:12 am
How many times in my callow youth did I employ Whitman's “I contain multitudes” to appear either funny or deep. Here it's a toss-off, contracted to just one word. Funniest yet. HAW!

–Bastrop, TX

hnkn says:
February 14, 2009 at 12:10 pm

@rhhardin

Ah! Now I see. I had my “charitable interpretation” goggles so firmly affixed that I missed it. Thanks for responding.

Richard Durbin says:
February 16, 2009 at 7:48 am

This is the kind of post that leaves me wondering if the recycling bins ever made it out. Oh the cliffhanging suspense!

Warren says:
February 16, 2009 at 2:31 pm

I noted one lunatic, who was speaking softly to himself, drawing patterns in the air with his index finger as he walked along, smiling the happiness of someone who sees things we don’t, knows them to be true, and likes what he knows.

Dang, man, if I'd've recognized you I'd've said hello!
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

MORE
Thanks for dropping by! Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Good weekend - but it takes a lot to make a weekend bad. Friday did not begin with the shiniest of auspices. Double fail: bad za, bad zzs.

The day, nay, the week ends with the twin promise of pizza and a post-meal nap, which has no alarm clock and hence goes on as long as the body likes. I may wake at eight, then hit the coffee pot, and stay up until three watching movies. Such is the boon at the end of the week. Well. I knocked off work around four, and didn't have to take Natalie to piano as the usual schedule requires; she was at a Valentine's day party, assembling compacted wads of sucrose and sheaves of rote protestations of affection.

Note to the boys: girls do not, and will not, dig 3D “Transformers” valentines as you do. Which is the point, I guess.

(enabling obligatory nostalgic reverie . . .loading . . .complete.) It reminded me of my own grade-school valentine experience, how the event really attained Great Significance in 5th grade when I had a full-blown hopeless crush on a skinny girl with long blonde hair: Colleen. (College cured me of blondes, but that's another story.) The immensity of my affection was not returned, and I knew it, but that didn't stop me from examining her Valentine card like a Bletchley Park cryptographer poring over an Enigma dispatch. I think the valentine was a cowgirl, expressing a desire to rope me in as a Valentine. Since there was nothing Western in my personality or interests, and nothing remotely Annie-Oakley about her, I had no choice but
to conclude the card contained no secret messages.

Naturally, I tortured my child by finding secret messages in the Transformer cards the boys had given to her.

Since we didn’t do piano, we didn’t stop at Davanni’s for the Friday pizza. I ordered from a local place I used to frequent every week, but hadn’t called in several months. They gave me a Grudge Za. You want to come back, do you? Here. Try this. The crust was raw, and the toppings had slid over the edge. The pizza looked like a burn-unit patient. Everyone hated it. Wife, child, me: We almost did a Fantastic Four hands-together pledge to never order from there again.

Which is a pity, since I used to like their pizza, and one of the guys who delivers for them is also the most knowledgeable film-geek at the local video rental joint. The first time he showed up I had a hard time recontextualizing him. If he’s showed up on Friday I would have said “I’m watching Mirnau’s ‘Faust’ tonight, then a Guy Ritchie movie!” And he would have said “cool.” But I got the other guy, the stone-faced fellow who would, in a late-80s / early 90s movie, play the cop you normally wouldn’t trust because he’d been a bad guy in some other movies you’d seen, but seemed okay here, and eventually showed himself to be the sort of guy who backed up the hero when the hero was going off the deep end and losing it, man. You know the character: he wasn’t shot in the second or third act. Sometimes he showed up at the last moment in the third act to save the hero, because he’d “heard the call on the radio” and managed to find the abandoned-yet-dramatically-lit-warehouse-complete-with-rotating-ventilation-fans-and-fog in time to walk in the door, size up the situation in four seconds and shoot someone.

That guy. Anyway, the pizza was horrible.

Then, the nap.

It didn’t work. I couldn’t sleep. I had a racing mind; I tossed, turned – which was utterly antithetical to the POINT of the Friday recharge. So I gave up, I got up, and I went to work. Pounded the coffee. Didn’t watch a movie and work on the website. TO HELL WITH THE WEBSITE. I cranked up old 80s tunes, and . . .

. . . Pretty much sorted all my tax, insurance, banking, and investment stuff. Yes, I CUT LOOSE. Around 11 PM I called my investment company for assistance in setting up the “don’t send me paper crap” option; the website said my account was already registered. Well. She walked me through a few steps, and we came to a series of screens that require me to click I AGREE and proceed. Once such screen had – really – 12 boxes that required me to click I AGREE, concluding with a box that demanded I actually type I AGREE and type my name.

I asked her what this page was about, exactly.

Sir this is (BEEP) something you agree to in order to set up (BEEP) your account

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=963
I know that – I’m just wondering what this page is about. What am I agreeing to? It’s the NASDAQ page.

Sir (BEEP) if you click on the boxes that say you agree you will (BEEP) be able to set up your account.

(The company has audible beeps to remind you that the conversation is being recorded; makes you feel as if you’re calling Houston to inform them that you stirred the tanks and half the engines blew off.)

She couldn’t tell me what the documents said, only that I had to sign them. So I concluded the conversation, hoping someone would review the tapes and conclude that it might be wise to bring the phone operators up to speed on the pith and/or gist of the EULAs.

End result of the evening’s work: totally cyber now, dude. The downside: when I call the investment banker company and enter the password, a voice actually tells me my investment balance.

I held the phone away from my ear and hummed the “Ode to Joy” until the recitation of carnage had concluded.

Natalie came into my office while I was working, and for some reason we got off on a YouTube loop about Disneyworld. Ended up watching an amazing counterstrike mod on the Haunted Mansion. I can’t wait to do that ride again. She has forbidden me to turn into Deaddy, the slack-jawed Zombie Dad character I always assume when we enter the Mansion. It really scares me, she says, which is why I do it. Disneyworld is all sugar happy glossy goofy; it needs a dark corner. Of all the moments in the Haunted Mansion, I think my favorite is the corridor of rooms whose doors shudder from the blows of the maddened spirits behind them. You can’t see what’s there; you have to use your imagination. It’s Paul Frees’ relatives, seeking to renegotiate the residuals!

Here’s the vid:

![YouTube video player](http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=963)
While we watched the video people were actually experiencing the same thing in real time – but that's the lovely thing about the Disneyverse. It only really exists when you're there.

Around one I shut down the machines and went downstairs to watch a movie. Watched "Rocka Roller," a Guy Ritchie film, and was fully prepared to have it wash over me in an enjoyable tide of vague comprehension. A Guy Ritchie film can usually be counted upon to have genial, interesting, decent criminals who are set against criminals with whom you would not want to have a drink. There's always the vague sense that Clive Owens may show up. If you lose track of the plot, that's okay; no one on screen seems to be overly concerned with it either, but they'll get around to it – in the meantime, enjoy the witty performances, crisp direction, mannered but still-effective transitional elements, and the sense that he's paying homage to a few elements of British culture you don't quite grasp, but sense nevertheless.

But here's the thing. There's one women in the movie. One. It's Thandie Wilson, extruded through the Posh-Spice template in the Play-Doh Fun Factory of female archetypes; she's supposed to be the femme fatale, but gor blimey, what a dud: either I'm insufficiently male, and my tongue should unspool on the floor like a Tex Avery wolf because she walks with the heel-toe catwalk saunter, or she's just a compendium of unearned, ineffective feminine "wiles" intended to show how simple tricks – tight suits, hauteur, greed, rote contempt – make the average bloke convert into putty with a priapic anomaly. There's nothing sexy about her. She has nothing to say; she can't even be bothered to stir herself to general bitchiness; not a joule of heat rolls off her performance, despite her evident self-regard for her own sexual power, however chilly it may seem. The movie lags whenever she enters the picture, and the characters seem happiest when they can return to the pub and hang with their mates. When the protagonist does eventually submit to cold rote coupling, it's accomplished with brief swooshy edits and relief when it's over.

This is the final movie the director made while he was married to Madonna.

—

More later, so by all means stop by. And of course there's buzz.mn at this very moment!

24 RESPONSES TO monday, feb. 16

Steve Keeley says:
February 16, 2009 at 3:56 am

When the fourth edition of the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary came out, one of the new words added was "za." This was a major
addition (along with “qi”) because it gave you ways to play a 10 point letter.

The definition it gives for “za” is “short for pizza.”

I had NEVER heard anyone use “za” for pizza. Until now.

You’ve just validated OSPD4 for me.

GardenStater says:
February 16, 2009 at 6:06 am

Nobody in my neck of the woods uses “za,” either. Of course, when we order it, we don’t say “pizza.” We just tell the guy we want a large pie.

That Disney clip made me queasy. Reminds me of why I don’t like video games. You get no peripheral vision. (And who runs with both hands held steady in front of their face?)

Mike Gebert says:
February 16, 2009 at 7:01 am

Thandie Newton, not Wilson. Yes, lovely build, underpowered circuitry.

Nancy says:
February 16, 2009 at 7:16 am

I think I remember this line from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: the turtles hanging out in their sewer crash pad and Michaelangelo in surfer-dude-speak –“I’m mad hungry for some ‘za”. We used to call pizza za back in the 90s when my kids were into the turtles. And What the heck? I thought contractions were a no no in Scrabble. I object!

Richard Durbin says:
February 16, 2009 at 7:23 am

Za was a frequently used word when I was in college, in the early 80’s. Perhaps it’s mainly the province of students who need to gnosh on za while pulling all-nighters?

ajtooley says:
February 16, 2009 at 7:32 am

Michael Rooker delivered your pizza?

Brian Tiemann says:
February 16, 2009 at 7:52 am

The Adult Swim show “Tom Goes to the Mayor” has a restaurant called “Pete's Zah”.

Sue me, I love that show.

Incidentally, I really really hope someone is making those “I Choo-Choo-Choose You” Valentines for real nowadays.
Bill says:
February 16, 2009 at 8:58 am

“This is the final movie the director made while he was married to Madonna.”

Best payoff line I've heard in a long time. Well done.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 16, 2009 at 10:20 am

Investment Companies – meh.

Why can't TD Waterhouse (or whatever they're called after whoever else they merged with this month) make their Tax documents available for import into Turbo Tax? They say they do. In fact for the past FIVE years, they've said they do. And yet, for the past FIVE years, I've had to enter them by hand. If it weren't for the for the sad state of those investments (“may not be an indicator of future performance…”)I would consider taking what's left and making a deposit in the Mattress of the Master Bedroom Trust & Thrift.

Our 7 year old enjoyed a double valentine's shindig. A party at school, and a party at her Brownie troop meeting. I thought about addressing the concept of exchanging valentines with a pack hens, but my wife re-directed me.

Gina says:
February 16, 2009 at 10:29 am

Ah, secret messages. Reminds me of when I was in college, and the thing to do was to send songs to your friends and/or significant others via voice mail. (Small Christian college, middle of nowhere — what else are you gonna do for entertainment?) My freshman roommate received a delivery of “I Can't Fight This Feeling Anymore” from her love interest one day, and played it about 920,756 times trying to figure out exactly what he meant by it, while I refrained (barely) from rolling my eyes, and kept trying to remind her that her boyfriend hadn't actually WRITTEN the thing. Ain't love grand? 😊

DryOwlTacos says:
February 16, 2009 at 10:53 am

Za with shrooms and roni: abbreviations that anteceded the txt msg generation.

JDB says:
February 16, 2009 at 10:57 am

Of course, it's Thandie Newton and Clive Owen, not Owens.

I've found Ms Newton very fetching from the Aussie film “Flirting” through to today. She's a very good actress and if you didn't find her ‘all that and a bag of chips’ in this film, it probably is a brickbat by Mr Ritchie at Mrs Ritchie who apparently cut conjugal rights some years before the divorce.

JDB says:
February 16, 2009 at 11:01 am
As for abbr. foods: I’ve heard both Za and Pie and also Sturd for your Dog.

And in Upstate New York, we say Hamburg and Cheeseburg and leave off the ‘er’.

The Simpsons referenced this in a Skinner-Chalmers exchange.

**Bob Sassone** says:
February 16, 2009 at 11:56 am

Right now he's directing a new version of Sherlock Holmes, with Robert Downey Jr. as Holmes and Jude Law as Watson. Supposed to be more Bourne-like. Coming this November.

**Bob Sassone** says:
February 16, 2009 at 11:57 am

That would be Ritchie I'm talking about, heh.

**Patrick** says:
February 16, 2009 at 12:45 pm

I remember as a kid doing the Valentine's Day party thing, having to go out and buy the box of small cards for the entire class, including the kids I didn't like. Unlike most boys, who bought Ninja Turtles, Batman, He-Man, Superman, Spiderman, Transformers, or other similar cartoon endorsers, I always got something that was gender-neutral, like Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, Mickey Mouse, or anything from that genre of cartoons. The girls always bought Barbie, Jem, Lisa Frank, Rainbow Bright, or Popples.

**Clay** says:
February 16, 2009 at 12:55 pm

James, I have a suggestion, even though there's no strib link in this post. When linking to the star tribune columns, you may want to use this url. It goes to your bio and list of all recent columns:
http://www.startribune.com/bios/10645306.html

**Lileks** says:
February 16, 2009 at 1:17 pm

It's amazing the things the spell-check doesn't Ah-OOH-gah, isn't it. You're right; singular Owen. In both meanings of the word.

**Jeff** says:
February 16, 2009 at 1:34 pm

A potential slogan for your deficient pizzeria: “We put the ‘P’ in your Za!”

… or not.

**Warren** says:
February 16, 2009 at 2:20 pm

“putty with a priapic anomaly” — sharp. Very sharp. It's always nice to see others use the term from time to time.
And you're not entirely correct in suggesting all girls won't appreciate Transformers valentine cards. I discovered this weekend how much of a nerd mine is; she actually used the term d20, correctly, in context.

It's definitely love.

**Alec** says:
February 16, 2009 at 2:21 pm

“Za” only exists today as a sarcastic term for those looking to choose the dumbest words possible. I should use it more.

**Rex V** says:
February 16, 2009 at 2:30 pm

The anti-corporate types always sing praises for the Mom and Pop restaurant and bemoan the presence of the franchise shops like Papa Johns and Pizza Hut but the dirty secret is that some of the small local places make horrible food. At least you get a constant level of quality from the mega Za providers. If you've got a local shop that consistently makes good pies and won't take two hours to deliver a screwed up order, then great.

**TaiChiWawa** says:
February 16, 2009 at 6:38 pm

A slender blond exhibiting latent bondage inclinations. By any chance, does Colleen currently reside in Las Vegas?

**Gary Imhoff** says:
February 16, 2009 at 10:16 pm

Thandie Newton has had a very uneven career, and she frequently chooses movies that don't show her off to her best advantage. (Oprah's execrable, unwatchable Beloved comes to mind here, and Thandie's laughable “southern” accent as Sally Hemings in Jefferson in Paris is completely off-putting.) That lets me take your word that she doesn't succeed as a femme fatale in RocknRolla, which I haven't seen. But, “there's nothing sexy about her”? Wrong, wrong, wrong. To name just a few movies in which she's sexy as any woman can be: 1) in Flirting, her first movie, she's a teenaged dream girl who'll steal your heart. 2) In The Truth About Charlie, a not-as-good-as-the-original remake of Charade, she's as desirable as Audrey Hepburn was in the original. 3) In Gridlock’d, she's sexy even as a wasted junkie. 4) In Crash, she's the only thing that makes it worthwhile to see the worst Oscar-winning Best Movie ever. 5) Most of all, in Mission Impossible II, she's breathtakingly beautiful, and has some the-camera-loves-her close-ups that put her in the same league as classic movie beauties such as Hedy Lamarr and Rita Hayworth.
can take care of it!

3: Black & White World
4: Sears 1934
5: Comic ads
6: 100 Mysteries
Institute of Official Cheer
Lint: the Institute Tumblr
PopCrush
Screedblog
Shorpy.com
StarTribune Column

Please install and activate the "Twitter for WordPress" plugin to use this section.

MORE

Thanks for dropping by!
Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed.
That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later.
Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Monday there was no school. I worked at home. Natalie had expressed a desire for Pancake Puffs, utilizing the special pan they bought at the Mall’s “As Seen on TV” store.

“Did you see it on TV?” I asked.

“Well, duh.”

Never quite understood why that was intended as an endorsement; I mean, everything has been seen on TV. Perhaps it’s meant to cement two fleeting associations, and reassure you that the object you hold in your hands once flickered across the infoscreen, and if you were wary of accepting imitations, your doubts would be calmed. I was not heartened by the Pancake Puffs booklet, which was laid out and proofread in 47 minutes. It said I would know the Puffs were ready when they were golden brown on the bottom – which is great if you’re Superman with X-ray vision, but otherwise it’s a bit hard to tell.

The illustrations manage to make everything look like sugar-dusted horse apples, too.

I almost didn’t make them, because she was supposed to sleep in this morn, not get up when she heard Mommy stir at the Crack O’ Dawn. But that was a silly rule, and I admitted as much. She was so looking forward to Pancake Puffs. First problem: no pancake mix. I found some Belgian Waffle mix, and...
used that. Made a batch. Real maple syrup. Wonderful. And so the day began!

That was the highlight, alas. Mostly sat and typed, then went downstairs and stood and typed. I did enjoy turning on the radio and hearing Bob Davis read my Sunday column. I also enjoyed a few hours of uninterrupted work – Natalie went to a friend’s house to play for a while. There’s nothing like having a friend down the street, is there? When I was growing up there were plenty of kids up and down 8th – less so here, now, but still enough. She wants to walk on her own, but wants me to watch. I stood on the porch until she disappeared at the top of the neighbor’s steps, hidden behind trees. Didn’t see her actually go in the house, but the 4073rd Airborne Predator Brigade hasn’t been seen around here for a while, so I assumed she made it in.

Went upstairs, back to work – and saw what can only be described as a creepy old van drive up the street. A two-tone model, maybe late 80s. It just looked wrong. It looked like the vehicle that would belong to someone who’d invented a harpoon gun that shot a lasso out the side door and pulled children inside just as they were reaching for the door of a friend’s house.

Of course it wasn’t, but these are the things that flit through your mind for half a second.

After the playdate – she lingered on the way home, cracking the ice with her heel – she finished her animation, and I helped her arrange it in iMovie. It’s based on the “Warriors” books, of course; they rule her life. The title sequence had a series of claw-slashes that rip through the word WARRIORS, and it took a while to make them as fast as she wanted. It also took a while for me to explain why she should learn about the Text feature of Photoshop, since she insists on drawing her letters. No patience for that. DAD IT’S FINE.

If you don’t know the Warriors books, well, here’s a sample of the text.

> Gingerkit stood outside the nursery, looking at the camp clearing. She felt the hot burning sun of new-leaf covering her face. She closed her eyes as she curled up on a green patch of wet grass. She curled her tail over her nose as she heard her little brothers mew. “Gingerkit wake up!” His annoying mew shivered her ears. She stood up, giving her chest a few swift licks, then mewed to him.

Just kidding. That’s a Warriors story my daughter is writing. ?(That would be the child who didn’t get a 4 in Reading, BTW.)

Daddy is proud.

**Didn’t finish** with the Saturday errands tales, did I? Not much to report, but there was a new brand-extension for Cheerios:
Flavored with Real Banana and Natural Banana Flavor.

What the hell is the difference?

The DirecTV installers are coming Tuesday morn to rip out my heart and replace it with some wretched ersatz device that isn't TiVo. I'm not too distraught, because TiVo will be returning soon to the company, and I'll not only get one free, the DVR I have now will be bumped to another room where there isn't a DVR. Why? Because they love me! And because I pay a monthly maintenance fee that seems to cover absolutely everything. Many years ago I actually bought my HD-DVR, but since then I've upgraded to new units twice. In a lofty theoretical sense I own the unit they're taking tomorrow. But it doesn't seem like anyone's keeping track. I found two satellite receivers in the basement a while ago, and when setting up the appointment for the new units, I asked if they wanted them back.

They didn't. Toss 'em. For those of us who were small kids in the early years of the Space Age, when the skies had about three satellites (Telstar, Sputnik, and, uh, one other) the idea of owning your own satellite receiver is still a thrill. Let me amend that: it's not a thrill at all. It's utterly routine. It's boring. In fact it's damned pain, because sometimes when the picture goes out you
have to go through the set up process and ask yourself if the dish on the roof has three guns or two, or whether it's oval or circular. And then you have to enter azimuth, or something. What the hell is azimuth? Didn't he write 2001? Anyway, it turns out it's not the dish or the satellite at all, but it's your receiver, and you can fix it by turning it on and off, or “Stirring the tanks” as we call it. It was so much better, once upon a time. Really. Everything was better. You’d crimp the foil on the rabbit ears just so and turn them to the left and tilt your jaw up so your fillings were correctly positioned, and then you'd only see three shadowy black-and-white ghosts following Barbara Eden around.

There's an actual opinion in there somewhere, but I’ll let you find it.

LATER: Comic cover, and a poetic Black and White world, plus Small Town Website of the Week over at buzz.mn. Stay tuned!

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34 RESPONSES TO Tuesday, Feb. 17

Rick Denison says:
February 17, 2009 at 6:07 am

*** when the skies had about three satellites (Telstar, Sputnik, and, uh, one other) ***

That would be the Echo passive-communications balloon, not so small at 100 feet or so, and which was so shiny (coated with space-age MYLAR!) that you could watch it glide overhead of a summer's eve. It was such a cool thing that some newspapers, such as the Bangor Daily News in Maine, published appearance times, right next to the weather forecast and seed-potato futures.

Cuneo says:
February 17, 2009 at 7:14 am

“As seen on TV.” Was there ever a time when when one heard a product plugged “as heard on Radio...” or as read in your periodical...” or “as used by the town crier...?”

Chuck Musciano says:
February 17, 2009 at 7:34 am

It must be the week to think about “old school” television. My children were astounded to discover that you can get TV out of thin air, as I wrote about yesterday: http://www.effectivecio.com. So many things that were amazing to us are now taken for granted, and so many things we took for granted are now amazing.

Aaron says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:04 am

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=1011
Flavored with Real Banana and Natural Banana Flavor … What the hell is the difference?

FWIW, I've been reading 'Fast Food Nation' this past week or so … Chapter 5 unveils the science of 'natural' and 'artificial' flavors and the difference between the two. In short, there's not much (difference), and the word natural is highly suspect. You can be fairly sure there were chemicals involved.

**mcsage** says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:05 am

LOVE “as seen on TV” store – was there EVER such a collection of NIB garage sale items? Amazing browse.

And hey, Clarke wrote “2001″ – Asimuth wrote “Lucky Starr, Space Ranger” and the infamous “Three Laws of Robotics.” Stick w/ Trek, NeoFanBoy.

And yes, the pun to Asimov was clever. I'm sure he appreciated it every one of the 38,000 times he hear it. Did you know he didn't fly? If he couldn't get there by train, he din't go.

**swschrad** says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:10 am

Vanguard. the third active satellite was Vanguard.

funny how some things stick in what's left of your balding head, isn't it?

you practically need a Decree from Caeser Augustus to get an old satellite receiver fitted with a new passcard… that and $29.95 after handling fees and toys for the urchins in the company day care. we did so for the basement bedroom, so Son #3 doesn't come upstairs and kick us off HGTV or TLC.

and it's been over 15 years that Stan Hubbard got a dime from it, too. but after betting the company, he came out whole and a bit better by inventing direct to subscriber satellite broadcasting.

**swschrad** says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:12 am

BTW, this was decreed by Congress to be The Day The TV Died, apologies to Buddy Holly fans.

except they couldn't get their act together on that, either.

**Mike Gebert** says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:21 am

“As seen on TV” meant something when there were three channels and only the big boys could play on them, I guess. So yeah, why anyone trumpeted that after 1967 is a bit mysterious, but trust me, lots of pointless things in advertising die hard.

**Gibbering Madness** says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:21 am

I don’t think “As Seen On TV” is intended to be an endorsement – it’s
intended to answer the shopper's question “hey, is that the microwave bacon thing I saw on TV?”

Yes. Yes, it is.

mikesdak says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:29 am

I think “As Seen on TV” harks back to when TV had real status, and it was assumed that something advertised there had been inspected and approved by some unknown but reliable authority, although I don’t think that actually happened.

wiredog says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:30 am

I got a DirecTV setup when I lived in Southern Utah, late last century. About 15 years ago. Cost less than local cable, and had way more channels. But didn't have the local channels, so I put an antenna on the roof.

Looking at the news from Japan today, and from Europe, reminds me of this:

I'm worried less about a recession than inflation. I'm worried most about a recession, inflation AND a jolly round of trade wars, coupled with fragile banks, overcapacity, diminished consumer confidence and aggressive messianic collectivism. Something about that smells familiar. I love studying the thirties and forties, but not first hand.

Sure hope all the html markup makes it through...

Formerly known as Skeptic says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:35 am

Personally, I've always considered the tag “as seen on TV” as pretty much a red flag since most of what is hawked on TV is utter Krep!

Richard Durbin says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:41 am

When I was in high school, there was a guy on my paper route who was building his own satellite dish. He spent the whole summer laying it up in fiberglass, one quarter at a time. Once bolted together is was maybe 15 feet across with a collector at the focus. It seemed amazing that he might pick up live network feeds, maybe some stuff from overseas. He had to have motors on it so it could be pointed at different points on the horizon and different elevations.

Occasionally I'll see the remains of those giant dishes rotting on their pedestals. So much work for a technology that was obsolete within 10 years. Since signing on to DirecTV 8 years ago, I've discarded 3 dishes and several receivers. Amazing.

Paul J. Marasa says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:41 am

America's Favorite “As Seen on TV” Moment: Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton doing their own commercial for the “Handy Housewife
Helper," resulting in the second most famous question (after “To be, or not to be”) in Western culture: “Yes, but can it core a apple?” Zip, zip, I am done.

Paul J. Marasa says:
February 17, 2009 at 8:55 am

Oh, and you made me wonder about “real” and “natural” flavors. According to popsci.com,

“The Food and Drug Administration requires that natural flavors come from a natural material, but that’s a broad category. It usually means developing flavors from plant or bacteria by-products, or chemically treating naturally occurring molecules. Chemists then tinker with these to enhance their taste. The sweet strawberry taste of your naturally flavored ice cream? That probably started out as a bacterial protein.”

I'm assuming “real” means some of the flavor comes from actual bananas.

miriam says:
February 17, 2009 at 9:10 am

Ha! I know what an azimuth
is:http://miriamsideas.blogspot.com/2008/08/what-is-ebright-azimuth.html

Mark says:
February 17, 2009 at 9:36 am

That's a nice bit of ‘fanfic’ there, that is.

Covvie says:
February 17, 2009 at 9:58 am

Of course you remember the name “Azimuth”. L. Ron Azimuth. The reason you don't remember his name *real well* is that he wrote _Dyarrhiacs_. So close, but didn't quite make it.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 17, 2009 at 10:29 am

That's a well crafted passage right there. Better get your agent on that, and remember to get your cut of the royalties.

We just decided to use the “As Seen On TV” tag in one of our yellow page ads, even though we are not currently running TV spots. It's true in the spirit of the statement, in that it has been seen on TV. Sorta. Maybe four years ago.

I am in the Sierra foothills, and have several friends tell me that Satellite is impacted by weather, so if anyone could lend some truth to that statement, let me know, since I need to make a choice soon.

Walter Neill says:
February 17, 2009 at 11:00 am

Congratulations to the Bleat for being names one of TIME's top 25 Blogs of 2009!!!
Spud says:
February 17, 2009 at 11:09 am

... you can fix it by turning it on and off, or “Stirring the tanks” as we call it. If it hasn’t been written, someone needs to write a book “The Reboot Generation”. It can start off with a curmudgeonly tone (Back forty-odd years ago you didn’t fix it by rebooting, you fixed the dang thing!) followed by the marvels of primitive life: getting up to change (all of 3) TV channels, filling ice cube trays, 8-track tapes and no microwave popcorn. The horror, the horror.

Nowadays it's either reboot or replace, 'cause it's too expensive to have someone fix it. This “stimulus” bill being signed today feels like someone's attempt at a reboot, only (G)Nat and the rest or our children will be feeling the boot for quite some time.

Doug Sundseth says:
February 17, 2009 at 11:11 am

@ juanito – John Davey: When I subscribed to a satellite television service, I had weather-related problems in two-and-a-half situations: 1. Very occasionally, when there was a significant buildup of snow on the dish, I would lose signal. Falling snow or rain didn't cause such problems. 2. When there was a big thunderstorm directly between my dish and the satellite, I would sometimes lose signal for a few minutes. 2.5 I live on one of the landing paths for Denver International Airport. When the wind was strong enough to require landing toward the east, I would occasionally lose signal for a few seconds as an airplane flew directly between my house and the satellite. (Weather-related, but not really weather, per se.)

FWIW, I was generally quite satisfied with the service I received (Dish Network).

HTH.

Michael says:
February 17, 2009 at 11:31 am

Ah, Piggly Wiggly in the banner... Awesome...

GardenStater says:
February 17, 2009 at 12:44 pm

L. Ron wrote “Diuretics,” as well...

John Carney says:
February 17, 2009 at 1:13 pm

My brother sent me a link to your post as I was, I kid you not, sitting at home waiting for DirecTV to come and fix or switch out my DVR / receiver, which was only installed a week and a half ago. Since that time, it resets itself every day or two, completely erasing everything on the DVR and forcing me, too, to answer that question about
which type of dish I have.

Over the phone, they’ve talked me through resetting the machine and even reformatting the hard drive, and nothing has worked, so a service call was scheduled. I’m hoping they’ll just switch the thing out.

I didn’t know that DirecTV and TiVo had kissed and made up, which is good news. I’ve put myself on TiVo’s mailing list for updates on that situation, so maybe I’ll move up to a TiVo in the second half of the year.

Dora Standpipe says:
February 17, 2009 at 1:38 pm

Do not fall for the pancake puffs pan people!!! There are several million pans out there already. They are called Aebleskiver pans. Aebleskiver are danish pancakes, normally made with apples as a filling. Search garage sales this summer. You can easily pick up a nice cast iron one for a dollar or two…or do what I did…I called my mother and borrowed hers. FREE!!!

John Robinson says:
February 17, 2009 at 3:31 pm

Back in the late 60s the invention of Jiffy Pop was our version of microwave popcorn. Prior to its arrival there was only one guaranteed way to make popcorn at home, and that was with a heavy pot, oil, and loose kernels you poured from a bag (if the lid got pushed off during popping, you knew you’d put in too much). Jiffy Pop’s expandable pan as it cooked (“like an aluminum turban” my dad commented) is what sealed the deal for us. Scared my grandmother, though; she thought it was going to explode, like a boiler on the Titanic.

And on another note, anybody who ever served in an artillery unit had better know what an “azimuth” is! *G*

Warren says:
February 17, 2009 at 3:57 pm

*The illustrations manage to make everything look like sugar-dusted horse apples, too.*

Coming from the author of *Regrettable Food*, this qualifies as a ringing endorsement.

Sugar-dusted horseapples! Yum!

jeischen says:
February 17, 2009 at 4:05 pm

I remember back in the late 70s, early 80s when a farmer’s prize possession was not his new pickup or tractor but his HUGE satellite dish in the front yard. Nothing says I just sold a huge crop for a profit like a 20-ft. fiberglass saucer setting next to the propane tank. I imagine getting 500 clear channels instead of the normal snow-distorted big 3 was akin to getting your first tube radio in the 20s.
juanito - John Davey says:
February 17, 2009 at 4:57 pm

I drive past an old 20FT satellite dish twice a day on my way to work and home. And it is at old farm property along Bass Lake road. Well, with our recent economic downturn and the complete and utter collapse of California, it might stay old farm property for a little while longer!

Karen in the Burgh says:
February 17, 2009 at 9:52 pm

“Flavored with Real Banana and Natural Banana Flavor. What the hell is the difference?”

Well that means they actually bothered to use banana puree but added the Natural Banana flavoring so they wouldn't have to use too much banana puree (49 cents a pound is expensive you know)
No actual nuts were used in this product, just nut flavoring. They had the nutritional info and the ingredient list on the Cheerios website.
Yes I am a nutritionist, why do you ask?

Ben says:
February 17, 2009 at 10:26 pm

Banana flavor is isomyl acetate (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isomyl_acetate). Our high school chemistry teacher mixed 2 chemicals together and made some once.

Natural banana flavor is the same as artificial banana flavor: isomyl acetate. The artificial kind will have impurities from the artificial processes used to create the chemical. The natural kind will have impurities from the natural processes used to create the chemical.

(There may also be other substances involved to make your banana flavor more precise.)

I dispute the value of “naturally” causing an oat-based cereal to taste like bananas. Cheerios are not bananas, so some amount of artifice must have been needed to effect their banana-like flavor. Nature did not intend oats to taste like bananas, regardless of what the box says. We'd be better off without the pretense.

Bridget says:
February 17, 2009 at 11:14 pm

So...the secret to pancake puffs (after almost an entire day of troubleshooting) is to turn the range on to about 4 (of 9) about a half hour before you want to cook. Oil well before you place the pan on the range. By the half an hour time point, heating will be very even and your puffs will be perfect!

jamcool says:
February 17, 2009 at 11:47 pm

Speaking of cereal...has anyone seen the Big G cereal retro packages? Trix, Cocoa Puffs, Cheerios, and Lucky Charms in original 60s-style packs with the cursive General Mills-Big G diamond.
While going through old pictures, I came across something I snapped in a Phoenix subdivision a few years ago. This was once a ubiquitous medallion; as a child I suspected this was the Full Service Banker's extended family.
19 RESPONSES TO bygone wonders

Al Federber says:
February 19, 2009 at 10:52 pm

Electric stoves? Phooey!
Bygone Wonders | The Bleat.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 19, 2009 at 11:47 pm

Tragically, I am in the Sierra Nevada foothills, and gas / oil pipes are a rare bird indeed. All electric for us! Water, Heat, Air, Cooking. And, yes our electric bill is outrageous, even though we're a few miles from the American River, and all of it's myriad hydro-electric projects. Solar almost makes sense for us.

My bride reminds me that if I shut off 2 or 3 of my servers, get down to a single firewall / router, and build my home-brew tivo/dvr on a lower spec machine, we might save some real $$$. Right, might as well cut of my right arm while I am at it.

Well, the leaking spa is unpowered at the moment, so I've got that going for me…

TIm of Angle says:
February 20, 2009 at 5:44 am

Left column still too narrow, cuts off right part of photo.

House of Mayhem says:
February 20, 2009 at 9:06 am

My stepdad's was an electrical contractor, and he has one of those doohickys on his house.

John Robinson says:
February 20, 2009 at 10:41 am

My grandparenst built a new house in 1961, and it had one of those brass jobbies incorporated into the doorbell as well. Nothing screamed WE'RE STRIDING BOLDLY INTO THE FUTURE; GAS OVENS ARE PASSE, YA BOOB like one of those…

Amanda Albright Flynn says:
February 20, 2009 at 11:19 am

When I was a kid, our house was built in 1930 and when I saw houses with that medallion on the doorbell or as a plaque in the flowerbed, I thought it very modern and glamorous. Our house certainly didn't have that, but we had a gravity-flow furnace, a cut out in the wall for the candlestick phone, and a crack in the basement (and what other Southern California house had a basement?) from where it survived although on the epicenter of the 1931 Long Beach earthquake.

MichaelsDaddy says:
February 20, 2009 at 11:32 am

I too was always impressed with those little medallions, imagining those houses to be high-tech wonders with intercoms, central vacuums, recessed lighting everywhere and TVs in every room. I think I let the GE Carousel Of Progress show at Disneyland in 1969 color my thinking a little too much.

Tim says:
February 20, 2009 at 11:49 am

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=1057
Boy, it looks like something out of Fallout 3, doesn't it?

swschrad says:
February 20, 2009 at 12:14 pm

that is definitely a cheap-a$h medallion doorbell.

the whole thing was cast bronze up about 20th avenue south on the
medallion homes there.

don't even get a first-rate doorbell. even the front door has only one
chime tone. bet our light switches start flickering in a year, too."

Bill McNutt says:
February 20, 2009 at 1:39 pm

We had one of those on the house when I was a kid in Charleston,
SC.

Bill

Daniel says:
February 20, 2009 at 2:30 pm

I used to have a three foot diameter Medallion Home medallion,
made of heavy dished particle board with a decal on the smooth
side in bronze and black. The Sacramento (California) Municipal
Utilities District was promoting the “all electric home” idea in the
late 1960's when my parents had the house built. I would offer to
sell the medallion to you on eBay or something but I used it to slide
down a hill in the snow once when I was 14 — it got soaked and
broke. You have again evoked powerful memories, sir.

Seattle Dave says:
February 20, 2009 at 4:07 pm

My late stepdad was a tile setter and general contractor who, in
1966, built (with his then-wife) the house my mom still lives in. He
liked the latest homebuilding innovations. The house is all electric
and has a NuTone intercom system (still works), central vacuum
(doesn’t), and security system (doesn’t), as well as the original GE
electric furnaces that still function. That doorbell button, alas, failed
a couple of years ago and I had to replace it with a plain-jane model
from the hardware store.

I would bet money, though, that if and when I ever get around to
going through all the accumulated building materials in boxes in the
garage, I’ll find at least one more of those doorbells in its original
packaging. That's just how he was.

D Palmer says:
February 20, 2009 at 6:13 pm

I'll second the 'electric stove phooey' comment. But add, try
induction.

Sure they're expensive (the Kenmore stainless model is ~$2,600),
and you probably will have to replace most of your pans, but wow it
works great. 7 years of electric only and I can finally go from boil to
simmer on the same burner without having to move half the pot off
the hot zone (I have a smooth top elect range).
Covvie says:
February 20, 2009 at 7:33 pm

Several houses on the street in the ‘burb of Cincinnati in which I lived had these. I thought then that having Reddy Kilowatt on there instead of people who should have been in “THEY CAME FROM ANOTHER PLANET”.

Covvie says:
February 20, 2009 at 7:34 pm

Oh, my. I need more caffeine. Let's try that last sentence again.

…PLANET” would have been a good idea.

Dora Standpipe says:
February 20, 2009 at 11:10 pm

I know “plain Jane” is a catchy phrase that has been around for many years and that people have used it when describing something that is unadorned, subdued or modest. But I am here to tell all of you… Jane's are not plain. I know many Jane's and they all dislike this phrase.

PersonFromPorlock says:
February 21, 2009 at 7:48 pm

Incidentally, the photo is a fine example of the simple truth that “A slotted screwhead is a buggered screwhead.”

Jay Moyes says:
February 22, 2009 at 4:30 pm

My family had one of those houses during the early 70’s. It was a place in Texas. While I don't remember the house (or the doorbell), I do remember there was a bunch of stuff that came with it.

For some bizarre reason, my dad kept the sign for scrap wood when we moved to California and I think that got discarded when he retired. Mom and dad may still have the two matching gold keys though, which they never had cut.

Matt Maynard says:
February 23, 2009 at 9:50 am

I remember one of those on my grandparents’ doorbell. Grandpa was an electrical lighting retailer, probably sold to hundreds of those homes in Arizona in the 50s, 60s, and 70s.

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING?
Use the form below to search the site:

VISIT OUR FRIENDS!
A few highly recommended friends...

ARCHIVES
All entries, chronologically...

Still not finding what you're looking for? Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!
Got the new camera today, and I’m loathe to say which one it is. I didn’t mention what I was buying before, because the internet is full of such damnably helpful people. Mention you need a new camera, and you get advice, and this just confuses the situation, and somehow prohibits you from complaining in the future. Well, I warned you not to get the Costco Vu-Plus, even if it came with a 48-pack of 2 GB memory cards. Better to go to Amazon and read the reviews – no, scuttle that; read the best and worst reviews. The best:

“This camera is GREAT. I had never bought a camera before since I dropped a Brownie down an outhouse in 1943, but this one TURNED ON when I pressed a button and took pictures that looked JUST LIKE the real world. Five Stars!”

The negative review:

“I had high hopes after reading the reviews for the Canon DP09434-88X, but upon opening the box I found a small, dead mouse. Needless to say this is not what I expected, and what’s more, there is noticeable grain in low-light shots.”
Some of the reviews are just technical enough to make you feel as if you're getting a good deal; they throw around terms like ISO and “lag” and “color,” and note comparisons with the previous camera, the Canon DP09434-87X – “Unlike its predecessor, this model uses the key of F for interface feedback.” This makes you think you're reading an actual review. You could go to the serious digital camera review sites, but they go into detail that makes you feel like an utter idiot who should not be using a camera at all, but should simply jot down notes and collect them later in the form of oral histories. You read the reviews, you buy the camera, but you can't quite shake the feeling that the review was right: the pinks are a little warm.

I have a good camera – a Canon SLR with a proper lens and an impressively authoritative shutter sound. It weighs too much and it's the size of a 1962 table radio, so I don't take it anywhere. I want something that will slip into my shirt pocket, and withstand the impact of slipping out of my shirt pocket when I bend over to tie my shoes. The last camera was a Casio Exlim (You loved our cheap beepy keyboards in 1982; why not trust us now with complex photographic equipment?) and I'd still be using it if it hadn't broke.

"It broke?" my wife asked when I told her I had to get a new camera. “You're getting another camera, I say, momentarily unaware of the quantity of indistinguishable black shoes I have in my closet?” (I'm adding words she must have thought but neglected to add.) “Did you break it?”

I explained that it broke itself, unlike the perfectly smart size 0 black suit she recently replaced with another smartly tailored size 0 black suit – I implied that last point with a gesture – and that there was no fixing it. These things were cheap, and perished on their own agenda. In this case it just refused to turn on. Sometimes it would turn itself on, and I would feel the lens extend in my pocket, which was disconcerting. I'm happy to see you too, but you're wasting the battery.

The new one is a Canon Powershot SD 770 IS Digital ELPH. I expect it will serve me for two years. Photos to follow tomorrow – I have been taking them for the one-a-day project with the iPhone and the camcorder, but haven't posted.

The first thing I did was charge the battery while I sorted through the manuals. Threw out all the foreign language versions; found the English book, and put it where I had put the unread Canon manual. Looked at the CD,
threw it away. Despaired anew over the presence of more cords. You can have too many cords. Everything comes with a USB cord and a video input cord these days. I bought a cordless toothbrush and it had component output.

**My day?** Fine, thank you. Up early. Did one video, edited two others, wrote the crime blotter update for buzz.mn, and some other items. Mostly walking-dead all day, though; I woke up early after a fabulous dream of an incredible house. I used to dream that I’d moved out of Jasperwood into crappy digs, and I woke with relief and joy; lately I dream of immensely cool high-tech homes with every possible Jetsonesque advantage, and I wake a bit dismayed. At least in this dream I wondered how I would pay for it, since the house was in Arizona, and we had no jobs. Nowadays that seems an impediment.

Was a better parent today; helped Natalie with her animations, but not much. Did piano without entering Sailor Mode. Made a wretched supper, though – I used a packet of “Santa Fe Style” taco seasoning, and it made the meat smell like the floor of an Amtrak lavatory, on fire. We took one bite and decided to have peanut butter sandwiches for supper. I cleaned up, apologized to one and all, then got back to work. It’s been, and will be, a sunup-to-bedtime workday, but since 38% of it’s volunteer – like this! – I can’t complain. No gun to my head.

Lance Lawson Thursday over at **buzz.mn**, starting now. Curious Lucre update around 1 PM or so; 14 pages of Peruvian money with historical annotations. It’s more interesting than it sounds.

I hope, anyway.

I leave you with today’s photo: another shot of the old garage attached to the StarTribune building. From here fleets of trucks thundered out to scatter the news city-wide. Nowadays the trucks come from elsewhere, and their purpose is a bit obscure to some: in the crime blotter roundup on buzz.mn, I noted a entry about someone who reported a suspicious person going door to door, doing something. The police should investigate!

He was delivering papers.
Pass it along, if you wish

20 RESPONSES TO *thursday, feb. 19*

**Margaret** says:
February 19, 2009 at 10:52 am

Time to upgrade your spice packets. Head over to Penzey's where they actually do have “taco seasoning.” Not far from you either, in the beautiful South.

**Spud** says:
February 19, 2009 at 11:19 am

While I’m tempted to rant on the unique cable for every camera you buy (and God forbid you should ever misplace it), I’m still trying to figure out how a replacement battery for my 4 year old digital camcorder costs about half the price of the stupid camera. I would not mind a slight amount of socialism if it meant standardized plug/cords and replacement battery packs.

(Yes, I know why camera companies like to have different cables)
and batteries, but still …)

**DensityDuck** says:
February 19, 2009 at 11:20 am

We had the same thing; after the neighborhood busybodies had a big “CRIME PREVENTION SEMINAR” and got everyone scared of Intruders, there were a number of reports of Strange People Going And Looking In Every House. And yes, they were in fact delivering papers. The homeowner's association eventually put out a letter asking us not to call the cops unless someone was actually smashing their way through the actual door; “suspicious people” were not grounds for a 911 call.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
February 19, 2009 at 11:22 am

Our Canon SLR is fansabulous! But, agreed, it does require Jack La Lane juicer derived strength to haul it around. Got it for my 5ft 2in wife. Here, this is for you, enjoy the burden!

We've been using a Kodak 10 MP for field trips, and general birthday and event documentation. It's shutter is almost as fast as the Canon. When I carry the Kodak, I feel like a Dad documenting his kid's young life. When I carry the Canon I feel like Peter Parker, on deadline for the Bugle!

**Andrew Sego** says:
February 19, 2009 at 11:45 am

I bought an SD770 in December shortly before my wife and I went to Disney World. It takes great pictures and has very long battery life, in addition to being significantly lighter and slimmer than our old camera. My wife even dropped it on the concrete to no ill effect.

Obviously the fraxlnipulator ratio is lower than my wife's Canon DSLR, but the vigitures are still high and I find the contrastemizer is very similar. There, do you feel like you just read a real review now?

**Patrick** says:
February 19, 2009 at 12:02 pm

Finding the dead mouse in the box isn't all bad. It's better than finding a live bobcat.

**swschrad** says:
February 19, 2009 at 12:15 pm

interesting light marks on the Strib garage, perhaps soon to be the visiting team's locker room. I suspect that notorious Italian gang, the Graffitos, broke in to steal the coupon flyers, and scratched “more Valassis, please” on the walls.

and the horrified bean counters, who could find no place to put the extra income, quickly sanded the messages down.

how times change.
Charlie Young says:
February 19, 2009 at 12:43 pm

Make your life simple... get a universal card reader for all your camera cards. For $20, it can be had at Target. That way, you don't have to worry about misplacing the darned cord (just don't misplace the card reader.

M Geiger says:
February 19, 2009 at 1:38 pm

The Elph is a good choice, I bought one for the same reason – it fits in a pocket, and has good resolution for it's size. An added bonus is it's long battery life.

I know the idea is to have a point and shoot, but being able to make minor changes, like iso settings on the fly instead of slogging through menus is nice too.

Warren says:
February 19, 2009 at 2:11 pm

FWIW, if it's a USB cable, they're interchangeable. Doesn't matter which cable came with which camera, as long as the camera-connection end fits. USB is to data what RCA is to video or audio.

I fell into the Nikon DSLR camp after meticulously comparing raw images taken with the Canon and Nikon cameras available at the time, and deciding I liked Nikon's saturation a bit more, even though the colors tend to run a little cooler.

Brian Lutz says:
February 19, 2009 at 2:30 pm

I do all my picture-taking with a Canon SD850 (roughly equivalent to the current SD1100 model) these days, and it works great (most of the time) and is easily pocketable. And the cables seem to be a lot more standardized these days than they have been in the past. Just about all my portable devices here (including my camera) use Mini-USB connectors, If I ever bothered connecting my camera to the TV, it would use basically the same cable as all the other ones do. A lot of the newer cameras are now including HDMI output as well, for display on HDTVs.

rivlax says:
February 19, 2009 at 2:36 pm

I know I'm probably missing something, but I don't get the photo of the support pipe and the paint-spattered cinderblocks.

rivlax says:
February 19, 2009 at 2:37 pm

OK, I just went back and re-read what I'd missed. Was looking for an actual loading bay, conveyor belts, etc.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
February 19, 2009 at 3:47 pm

The Strib building also has a wallpaper of “no guns allowed” signs.
across the back, which I found remarkably ineffective.

swschrad says:
February 19, 2009 at 7:11 pm

I would have expected a stripe of “no gubs allowed” signs, with a little correction notice of “the Star-Tribune meant to say ‘no guns allowed.’ the late Herkimer Q. Phosbot III, night guard, regrets the error,” just inside the back door.

but then, I've been in a puckish mood all week, in class at work with a few of the more notorious cut-ups in the company's history.

Poagao says:
February 19, 2009 at 7:55 pm

Saying “the camera takes good pictures” is like saying “the keyboard writes good columns.” Pretty much any camera these days is more than enough for most people (before it breaks, anyway), and I think you realize that.

Nancy says:
February 19, 2009 at 10:21 pm

I LOOOVE my 4 year-old Canon Powershot S410 digital ELPH. It is only 4 Megapixels but it takes outstanding pictures. My only complaint is the size of the display. I don't see it quitting anytime soon so I will just let my husband have it and go for the newer Canon Powershot Digital ELPH with the enormous display. We have a Big old SLR and a full size 3 megapixel Canon that takes good pictures but is not as user-friendly. They all still work too.

js says:
February 20, 2009 at 7:31 am

I'm going through the 'looking at buying a new camera' hell too. I think I'm going to go for the Olympus E-420 10 Megapixel E-Volt DSLR SLR Digital Camera Kit 2 and yeah I just copied and pasted that.

My camera sucks but I've taken a lot of very cool pics with it... cool to me at least. But when I look at the detail in those SLRs I realize i gotta get my hands on one o those puppies.

Julie Smith says:
February 20, 2009 at 10:05 pm

I live in Arizona and the real estate market is so depressed right now that I'm sure you could afford just about anything you wanted, Jetson-wise. In fact, I suspect that if you just walk into any “Open House,” the real estate agent will just GIVE the house to you, in gratitude for showing up.

Lileks says:
February 21, 2009 at 12:03 pm

So I understand, but it depends on the area, doesn't it? Surely DC ranch is still selling, albeit at greatly reduced prices.
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2: Comic Covers
3: Black & White World
4: Sears 1934
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ARCHIVES
All entries, chronologically...

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In the early **early** AM I went to shoot some video of a can of tomato soup. Why? I can't say. It's the super-secret project, details of which will be writ across the sly in flaming letters in 10 days or so. I went first to a local high-end store, thinking they'd have a nice brand-block I could shoot; as a dutiful member of the Respected, Established Media I asked to see the manager to get permission. You expect the Manager to stride out like a casino boss, but this fellow had a fearful, beaten quality, and for a moment I thought the store was behind in its protection payment. Nice deli counter you got here. Shame if anyone disturbed these carefully fanned-out cheese slices.

I showed him my ID, explained that I wanted a brief video of some tomato cans, and it wouldn't be broadcast, and there would be nothing in the shot that identified the store. If I thought it would have helped I would have said I planned to destroy the footage after shooting it, and set myself on fire in the parking lot.

"I know this is going to sound ridiculous," he said, and I almost said “Stop right there. Man up. This is not a plot to steal your proprietary can-stacking algorithms. Oddjob is not elsewhere in the store at this moment prepared to decapitate you with his hat the moment I have stolen the secrets.”

But I didn’t, and he went on: “All pictures have to be cleared with the company before.”

I understood, but criminey. A year-and-a-half into this video-production
angle, and I have boundless sympathy for everyone who does this on their own. There's a certain stratum of officialdom, be it government or corporate, that has a psychic spaz when they see a video camera. You there! Stop capturing reality! I don't know what you'll do with it!

The lesson? Shoot it without asking permission. I'm sure that's the lesson they want us to draw.

I went to a convenience store I knew and got what I needed, and had a delightful conversation with the cashier-stockperson. You could tell it was a college-area store: she wanted to know if the shots were for a piece on Warhol.

After the morning's duties were done I drove home to finish the column. Since I had the videocam on the other seat, I took footage of the parkway—stuff I can use for the monthly home video. (Never have enough stuff for the first three months of the year.) I was listening to the 80s channel on XM, absent-mindedly reassuring Robert Palmer not to worry, that he had not turned me on, driving the familiar curves at the usual speed, filming with one hand—

- and when I look at the footage in years to come, I will remember why the camera's suddenly tossed in the passenger seat, staring at the ceiling. There was a car up on a snowbank, perpendicular to the road. I pulled right over. It's instinct, or at least it should be.

I walked over and marveled at the situation: I could tell by the tracks that the car had spun out, jumped the curb, shot through the rock-hard snow, ended up on the broad ground that flanks Minnehaha Creek, turned around pointing towards the road, rolled forward and got stuck on the glacier. Two of the wheels had no purchase.

The driver was okay, but unhappy. As you might well imagine. I tried rocking it out, I tried pushing it out (whoa, buried Ring Around the Collar cadences doing a mental chest-burster there) but nothing worked. A fellow came by, walking his dog; we tried again. Nothing. The woman called her husband, who said he'd be on route; in the meantime, another fellow stopped his car and came over to help. His cap said "Life is Good."

The husband arrived with shovels, and hacked at the snow while the guy with the dog wondered if he could pull it out with his Jeep. We pushed and grunted and tried everything: nothing worked. I couldn't very well leave, especially since the driver recognized me. Oh, I met him. He left my car high and dry in the middle of winter! Big stuck-up snot. I don't imagine she would have said that, but being recognized always changes things. You're on your best behavior. Which also makes you wonder why you're not on your best behavior all the time. It's like checking your fly before you go out in public, isn't it?

Then the guy with the dog reappeared in a Jeep. He hooked up a line to the axle, put 're in gear, and pulled the car off the snowbank. Having seen
“Master and Commander” the previous night, I actually cried “Huzzah!”

Drove home, feeling as though I’d done good, even though I hadn’t done squat. Well, no, I actually had done squat, literally, but nothing resulted.

More to come – busy night, what with karate and a column and working on a piece of music for a Strib commercial. The key to happiness is diversity of purpose, and any week where I’ve shot and edited videos, written the usual work for buzz, composed a ditty and written columns for the paper is a damned fine week. And then there's this! More pleasure.

Now the blessings of Friday. Later today: 100 Mysteries, and perhaps a few more items. See you soon.

Oh – right. Strib column!

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23 RESPONSES TO *friday, feb. 20*

**rhardin** says:
February 20, 2009 at 3:26 am

Here's a [rare photograph](#) of an official supermarket photography team photographing meat.

If you yourself are officially spotted in a supermarket with a camera, incidentally, just hold it to your ear as if it's a cell phone.

---

**Jeff** says:
February 20, 2009 at 6:17 am

Huzzah!

---

**Moishe3rd** says:
February 20, 2009 at 6:25 am

Amazing!
That's the problem with gettin' older. Sometimes you just don't remember what happened yesterday…
Because, as far as I know, I'm the only person who walks around with a “Life is Good” cap all the time.
I am so impressed that other people actually wear this cap that I'm going to find out who this person is by starting a facebook/yahoo/blogger/thing club/group whatever, based on “Life is Good” caps. (I know, I know, it's already a website – where do you think we get them from?)
And, an interesting point about being recognized.
Observant Jews often look like what the public views as “stereotypically” Jewish – the peyes (earlocks); black hat; yarmulke; tzitzits (strings hanging out of our pants); etcetera. We are enjoined daily to not do things that would cast aspersions on Judaism due to the same reasons a “celebrity,” such as yourself, would feel that way. We don’t want to give ourselves, Judaism, and G-d, a Bad Name.
It shows the strength of a person's character that he or she would be...
concerned about that on a personal level. Your parent's appear to have brought you up correctly, James.
Well done.

**swschrad** says:
February 20, 2009 at 6:51 am

Nice instincts for Minnesota. those of us who cut our teeth on newsroom lore growing up would have shot off 30 seconds of video before putting shoulder to the fender.

gotta have that jiggle for chroma-key.

**Kimberly** says:
February 20, 2009 at 7:43 am

A few years ago, on Black Friday no less, I had my mother take a cellphone photo of me next to a cardboard cut out of Donald Trump. (I think The Donald was selling shirts and ties.)

It was in Macy's and one of the cashiers called security on us. No taking photos in the store! Either that, or I was just too tacky for them.

So I gave them the $50 of merchandise I was going to purchase and we left. I'm still puzzled though.

**Bryan** says:
February 20, 2009 at 7:58 am

I often shout “Huzzah!” when successful at some menial task. I picked it up from the MST3K episode Pod People where they're excoriating the Ren Faire guy.

By the way, today is Joel's 48th birthday.

**gmann63** says:
February 20, 2009 at 8:35 am

Hmmmm... did the guy in the Jeep really hook the towline to the axle? I remember I tried to do that once when I was a teenager and being pulled out of a muddy spot, and was looked at as if I were the village idiot. “Good way to ruin your axle” the guy said. “Hook it to the frame.”

The more you know...

**wiredog** says:
February 20, 2009 at 8:48 am

You did good. You stopped to help, thus demonstrating Civic Engagement.

**St. Chris** says:
February 20, 2009 at 9:01 am

I've met the brothers who started the **Life is good** clothing company. (Yeah, just the “L” is capitalized.) Great guys, good company, and really comfortable clothes. It's rare for me not to wear one of their t-shirts.
ALL-TOO-FAMILIAR - The Public Interest : WTVC

Newschannel9.com says:
February 20, 2009 at 9:38 am

[... blogger runs into an issue we here at the NewsChannel encounter too many times to [...]

G.P. says:
February 20, 2009 at 9:44 am

I have two questions about buzz.mn. First, is it possible to get an account to post comments there? It's the damndest thing, there doesn't seem to be a link anywhere to register a new account.

Second, why do the “Local Headlines” never change? Minneapolis will buy you a house; University-area reps working to lift Cuba embargo; How to get rich investing in mortgage-backed securities (I made up that last one).

Al Federber says:
February 20, 2009 at 9:46 am

I think store management prevents people from taking photos simply because they can. You notice that we don't have the option of them not recording our every move while we're in their establishments. It's absurd.

jeischen says:
February 20, 2009 at 9:57 am

“Drove home, feeling as though I’d done good, even though I hadn’t done squat. Well, no, I actually had done squat, literally, but nothing resulted.”

Reminds me of my dad's favorite saying: “Well, it's not better than nothing, but it's just as good.”

Jason T. says:
February 20, 2009 at 10:00 am

Back in my newspaper days, we were about to get a new area code that would split one suburban town in half.

A photographer and I were riding around, getting “man on the street” opinions and desperately looking for anything worth a picture.

Well, right on the area code line was a Radio Shack store that had a big display of phones in the front window.

We asked if we could snap a photo of the phone display.

Man, you would have thought we had asked for Mr. Tandy's social security number and blood type.

Honestly, some of these big corporations need to allow employees to use common sense once in a while.

Amanda Albright Flynn says:
February 20, 2009 at 11:15 am

That “Huzzah” was well placed and life being good is about those
opportunities.
If I were a store manager, I would have emailed corporate with the request, saying that if they did not respond while the customer was still there, I would assume that was an affirmative answer about the request. That's probably why I'm not a grocery store manager.

Lileks says:
February 20, 2009 at 11:52 am

Good questions! As for the first, it's possible, but I wouldn't recommend it, since the site is about to change in very profound ways. Thanks for trying, and I know it's hard – one of the things that exasperates. As for the local headlines, they've been inert since certain changes were undertaken to prepare for the new version – which never happened. I haven't pushed it, because I've expected the change to happen ANY DAY now. They say it'll be a fortnight or so until the new version, and I hope that's so.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 20, 2009 at 11:59 am

Maybe it was the little mustang video but, I was thinking that whenever you feeling down or doing an unpleasant task, pretend you are in a Benny Hill sketch.

cue “Yakkety Sax”: car spins out and helpful James get out to help, lady get out of car and is wearing short skirt, she has huge tracks of land. . .

. . . later while trying to push, James is distracted and while trying to place his hands back on car, he puts him on the lady's bottom just as here husband drive up. . .

. . . as husband chases James around in snow, rugged jeep driver stops to help lady and hooks cable up to axle, she gets in jeep with Mr. Rugged and they hit the gas, rip out axle and the scene ends with husband chasing Jeep and axle down road.

Works with lots of things 😊

Soulcoffr says:
February 20, 2009 at 12:28 pm

Take it from a seasoned television news photographer…

It's always easier to ask for forgiveness, than for permission.

GardenStater says:
February 20, 2009 at 12:38 pm

A fortnight. OK, James. I'll believe it when I see it.

(And when you don't repeat the same Lance Lawson you ran LAST Friday. The Buzzards are having a field day!)

Deana says:
February 20, 2009 at 12:57 pm

On the Huzzah note, I must heartily recommend the Patrick O'Brian series—the language, the adventure! These books bring happiness to my life and require nothing of my brain. Great characters set in a well-told story. They're boy's adventure stories for grown-ups.

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=1074
DensityDuck says:
February 20, 2009 at 12:57 pm

On the other hand, here’s an example of how NOT to tow something:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lzSc3CrTrQ

And a bonus video! http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cb0feM6imXE

Stephanie Roberts says:
February 21, 2009 at 7:54 pm

I’m distracted by the surrealism of getting your car stuck on a snowbank and having Lileks show up to try to help, as a crowd gathers, until you are finally freed and he shouts Huzzah! Really, it sounds like a story I’d tell the hubby and he’d say ‘no more pizza before bed’ 😅

Headless Unicorn Guy says:
February 24, 2009 at 11:02 am

“Stop right there. Man up. This is not a plot to steal your proprietary can-stacking algorithms. Oddjob is not elsewhere in the store at this moment prepared to decapitate you with his hat the moment I have stolen the secrets.”

Man, Lileks, that’s a GREAT line!
Gotta use it myself sometime!

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Thanks for dropping by! Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?

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The weekend was excellent, because it was the weekend. And for other reasons. Saturday I ran errands, of course; that meant Target. I was pleased to see the first true sign of spring: the “international bazaar” section, which exists simply because they haven’t invented a holiday between Christmas and spring with sufficient retail mass to fill the seasonal area, had switched over to Garden. This meant the new Gazebos. Long-time Bleat enthusiasts will recall how I loved the first Target gazebo, how it eventually fell prey to rot and and was felled, and how last year I bought something that had the mass of an anorexic cricket, and ended up on the other side of the yard whenever someone sneezed down the block. It was a twisted wreck after two storms, and I despaired of ever finding something to replace the good sturdy woody gazebo of seasons past.

Well, this year they have the Wellington line, and it’s heavy. I will be buying one soon, and it will be up in, oh, three months. Sigh. But! I could get it online for $50 less, with a 15% discount. On the other hand, shipping is $149.00. Let me think about that NO. Good news: if it costs that much to ship, it will stay put when the storms come. I should have suspected trouble when the last gazebo shipped free.

The storms will come, too. Can’t wait. Ah, to sit outside with a glass of something chilled, hearing the rumblings on the far side of the horizon. To be warm at night, outside. To hear the soft, strangled gargle of the Oak Island Water Feature running dry. It seems very far away right now, and I suppose
that's good; sick of winter as I am this is no time to weaken, or whip time's flank and demand more speed. But the storms will come. I think we're due for a serious summer with an early spring – the cycle of late, clammy springs is due for an end. Then again, a hot summer would be more proof that the world is ending, I suppose.

Not to exhaust my supply of Pollyanna sauce, but I am tired of doom. Forbes.com has a piece about the emptiest cities in America, part of the collapse-and- decline fever (catch it!) everyone seems to enjoy so much. There's a story about the cities were home sales are doing fine. It begins:

“Something funny’s happening in Las Vegas. Home sale prices from last year are down 28%, but home sales are up 15%.”

I've been sitting here for the better part of ten minutes, trying to figure out why. Oh, I could probably read the article and find out the strange, arcane economic forces at work, but it's just so damned counterintuitive it must be anomalous. Can anyone explain this to me in simple terms? How prices can go down but sales go up? Because I'm in the same boat as the author: something funny's happening.

As for the Forbes pieces on the “emptiest” cities: the title fits nicely with the modern mood, which already has the country in total collapse, its cities abandoned, and most people living in boxes. (But still economically segregated: the poor live in Kenmore refrigerator boxes, the rich live in Sub-Zero refrigerator boxes.) One of the “emptiest” cities is Chicago – it has a retail vacancy rate of 11.8%, and a home vacancy rate of – ready? – 3.7%. It's the 12th emptiest city on the list. Ninety-six-point-three percent of its homes are occupied, and it's on a list of “emptiest” cities.

During the Recession of ’91 I was living in DC. The city did not thrive during a downturn, despite all the money sloshing around; the housing boom was bust, there was too much retail, too many new office buildings. Everything was dead, and it felt dead. Gloom had settled over the land like a black fog. One of the most popular books was called “America: What Went Wrong?” Written by journalists – I know, clap your cheeks in shock – it was the bible for the Declinist Movement. I can’t think of a single moment in my adult life when a significant number of Important People weren't insisting that America was over, or doomed, or headed for the ash-heap of history, and there was always a dank sweaty joy that rolled off them as they made their pronouncements. Intellectual Corporal Hicks Syndrome: GAME OVER, MAN.

Anyway: the bureau for which I worked did a series of stories called “America: What Works?” It was a nice idea. Find the good news. Find out what was still chugging along. Find out which new theories were looking ahead. Somehow things got better eventually, though. Damndest thing.
Yes, I know this is different, but trust me, it's always different. As Tolstoi said, every happy economy is alike. Every unhappy economy is different in its own way.

**Sunday** I went to shoot a video re: the removal of the giant cherry from the giant spoon at the Walker Art Center sculpture garden – it’s one of those Claus Oldenburg jokes works of art that recontextualizes commonplace objects and makes you think about them anew, because they’re now very big. In the sixties there was a brilliant series on the contra-positioning of everyday things to illuminate the essential powerlessness of post-industrial man; it was called “Land of the Giants,” but that’s another essay. The cherry-and-spoon thing is much beloved around here, and regularly shows up whenever someone wants to show what a cultured – but whimsical! – place this is.

Alas, the removal of the cherry won’t take place until Monday, so I had to animate the removal by using a giant Terry-Gilliam-style hand. Only took as many frames as Baskin-Robbins has flavors, but it was time-consuming.

While at the sculpture garden, I tried out my new camera (Canon Digital Sylph CD0733-ZZAmior). The standard view of the hallowed approach to the spoon:
A strange sad old metal man:

This is what we see up here when we die. Not a corridor with a light at the
end, but a snowy skyway.

Back later with the Monday Matchbook – and the weekly Product Roundup. See you over at buzz.mn!

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35 RESPONSES TO **monday, feb. 23**

**juanito - John Davey** says:
February 23, 2009 at 1:25 am

Ah, the Bleat of olde! Time machine! I get to read tomorrows postings today thanks to the placement of the Pacific Standard Time zone. 11:24PM Sunday as I type!

I've gone through three Target Gazebos. The First two were identical. The original got tossed in a wind storm. Went to Target in the early spring and they were having a closeout on the model that attempted to follow Dorothy on a voyage to Oz. Original was about $350.00. Replacement was $67.00. I, too, thought it was in error, but
no, they were clearing them out. So I had a replacement canvas top on hand and ready to go.

The second lasted two more years, and it too ended up twisted. In fact, it got tossed up from the back of the yard and up into the redwoods at the top of the hill near the house. Traveled about a third of an acre. Bah.

Last year picked up a new gazebo for about $400. Sturdy as all get out, even though it contains an abundance of aluminum. This one will bolt down. And you can fill the legs with Sand or concrete. Fingers crossed... The next will be a permanent outdoor room with a real roof and a semi-enclosed area to protect form the elements. Darn roof will cost a fortune, because our CC&Rs state that it must match the roof on the house. Concrete tile...

Karla Duffy says:
February 23, 2009 at 6:15 am

I'm glad you mentioned a permanent structure, juanito, I planned to ask James if he'd considered such a thing.

Sometimes, James, our troubles are caused by making decisions we KNOW will chap our behinds later but are too lazy/frugal/stubborn to do differently. After 3 or 4 gazebos meeting roughly the same fate, I hope I'd be looking at a solution to the problem, not repeating same problem with a less expensive/more expensive item.

hpoulter says:
February 23, 2009 at 7:28 am

We got the “Wellington”, or one that looks just like it, at Target two years ago and it is about to start its third season. This is after buying several lighter ones that disintegrated in the winds. This one weighs over 200 lbs, and even has holes in the bottom flanges of the pillars where you can stake or screw it down. I live at the crest of a big hill where the winds whip upslope sometimes in excess of 50 MPH. On those days, I “reef” the canvas on the thing. a 10’x10 roof makes a pretty good sized sail.

We also got the “chandelier” (6 weatherproof lamps) that hangs from the peak of the gazebo (with a little careful jury-rigging). Makes it a very elegant little sitting room evenings.

I hope Lileks' new one lasts him a long time.

Ronsonic says:
February 23, 2009 at 7:36 am

Sorry, a correction. That was Pvt. Hudson with the “Game over” line.

Signed:
Dork

hpoulter says:
February 23, 2009 at 7:49 am

I love that movie. It's easy to confuse “Hudson” and “Hicks” in retrospect, but Hudson is the guy everyone remembers. Hicks is the “stay frosty” guy. I think the best line goes to Ripley, though:

“I say we take off and nuke the entire site from orbit. It's the only way to be sure.”
DaveInAz says:
February 23, 2009 at 7:51 am

“…one of those Claus Oldenburg jokes works of art that recontextualizes commonplace objects and makes you think about them anew, because they're now very big.”

I. Am. Still. Laughing.

John F. Opie says:
February 23, 2009 at 8:00 am

Hi -

In my real life, I'm an economist.

Surely it's not too hard to understand that if prices come down, sales go up. If prices go up, sales go down, at least under market-clearing conditions (i.e. everything gets sold that is put up for sale, just not necessarily at the price the seller wants...).

Or am I missing some Midwestern humor/irony/sarcasm here? Hard to tell since I stopped listening Prairie Home Companion...

rdh says:
February 23, 2009 at 8:04 am

I'm tired of the doom and gloom, too. Pass the Pollyanna sauce!

GardenStater says:
February 23, 2009 at 8:16 am

John:

Yes, I believe that James was being sarcastic when he claimed to be dumbfounded about the workings of the real estate market. It is, after all, pretty straightforward.

hpoulter says:
February 23, 2009 at 8:30 am

I don't want to rub it in, but that was the point. The fact that that quote was from “Forbes” just makes it funnier.

And “Prairie Home Companion” is not funny.

swschrad says:
February 23, 2009 at 8:34 am

animation. giant hand. can't see the radio button. darn.

how much better to have the Giant Foot of Grok stomp the spoon handle flat, and the cherry goes flying out of the scene. through space. landing on the White House Lawn.

from whence hilarity (or Hillarity) ensues at the Ministry of Stealators (tm.) fact: there has never been a better time to cry.
Famous example of similar clueless headline:


James,

Para 6, I think you used downtown where you meant to use downturn……

Cpl Hicks (Michael Bien) to Lt. Gorman (William Hope): “I'm Hicks – he's Hudson.” So even Lt. Gorman couldn't keep 'em straight.

If it's pumped-up doom talk you want, flip the channel to nearly any televangelist; they have the knob turned up to 666. They know that there's money in them thar fears.

Notable among these slicksters is the weirdly chimp-like ex-con Jim Bakker, who is now fronting another Christian condo community scheme, this one called “Morningside”, south of Branson, Mo.

Bakker claims to be stockpiling multi-year supplies of freeze-dried foods. He touts Morningside's big generators, which will keep them powered up and on the air when it all comes a'tumblin' down.

He occasionally scolds residents publicly on his TV program, admonishing them to keep their mouths shut and not criticize, lest they succumb to “witchcraft”. Creepy, in the extreme.

Oh well. Looks like Minneapolis is on the worst places to live list. Looks like I'm going to continue having problems explaining why it's a good place to live.

Frank Rich's Sunday column was about how we are all ignoring bad news. I love Frank, but he's off-base. Remember "$7 Gas By Summertime”? Yah. The news is *always* doom-n-gloom, and not always accurate.

Mr. L … would you mind posting the words that adorn the snowy bridge? I used to jog across that thing every day and I always read them, perhaps to take my mind off my exploding lungs (those stairs were a bitch!). I thought I'd never forget them, but … ah … I did.
Gibbering Madness says:
February 23, 2009 at 9:40 am

_It's easy to confuse “Hudson” and “Hicks” in retrospect_

Hudson, sir. He's Hicks.

I have a friend who, without fail, commented at the beginning of each “Starcraft” match “is this going to be a stand-up fight, or another bug hunt?”

Mijnjax says:
February 23, 2009 at 9:49 am

It depends on whether xenomorphs are involved. If yes, another bug hunt.

Jonathan Bailey says:
February 23, 2009 at 10:48 am

Sorry, make that para 8, living in DC, etc.

js says:
February 23, 2009 at 10:48 am

Wha? Why are they taking the cherry off the spoon?

Posted from Chicago which doesn't seem very empty to me except maybe a little bit existentially.

Brian Greenberg says:
February 23, 2009 at 10:51 am

Ah, sweet serendipity! A chance to relate two of James Lilek's passions in one comment!

I know Claus Oldenburg from another context: he designed the giant, aluminum “broken button” on the campus of my beloved alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania (picture here).

And then, a Penn alum who works on the animation staff for _The Simpsons_, immortalized it in cartoon history (screenshot and commentary here).

I can only imagine what Homer would do with a giant cherry on a spoon. Mmmmmmmm……Cherry……….!

SullyAg says:
February 23, 2009 at 10:55 am

“I can't think of a single moment in my adult life when a significant number of Important People weren't insisting that America was over, or doomed, or headed for the ash-heap of history, and there was always a dank sweaty joy that rolled off them as they made their pronouncements. Intellectual Corporal Hicks Syndrome: GAME OVER, MAN.”

Bravo, and spoken like a man who grew up during the 1970s, when everything was ending. We survived those dismal days, and we'll survive these, too. Prices go down, sales go up — what a relief, the laws of supply and demand still work. Somebody remember to send BarryO a memo about that. 😁
Steven says:  
February 23, 2009 at 11:04 am  
I believe they carry Pollyanna sauce at Target now. In the international bazaar section.

Ben says:  
February 23, 2009 at 11:05 am  
The reason your house doesn’t rot or blow away in a light windstorm: you didn’t buy your house at Target.

It may be worth considering the characteristics of things that last more than a year or two and then searching out a gazebo that shares some of those characteristics.

roger h (bgbear) says:  
February 23, 2009 at 11:13 am  
At least the cherry and spoon look like something. Pretty tired of the twisted metal and stone that usually populates public art.

Representational stuff is also unappealing in modern public art. In Santa Cruz, Ca there is this awful statue of a small family shrieking in terror looking up at the sky. We used to call it the “Nuclear Family” because they were waiting to die after Reagan pushed the button as everyone in at the time was sure was going to happen.

http://www.runningwolfpack.com/potw/potw05_1105.jpg
(I guess it is really called “Collateral Damage” How whimsical 😛)

Capt. Queeg says:  
February 23, 2009 at 11:22 am  
Here's Cleveland's very big “art” thingy. Giant 'FREE' stamp.

http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1398/770416963_3cd21b0c81.jpg
And they placed it right where you'd expect it: on the lawn next to city hall.

Lileks says:  
February 23, 2009 at 11:31 am  
I'm sure I did – thanks. Will fix when the monkeys stop clawing at my hair. Unless they're hallucinations, in which case this could go on all day.

Natalie says:  
February 23, 2009 at 12:00 pm  
Okay, your comments of Summer has given me the twitches of withdrawal, but alas, I’ll be donning the down-feathered coat today, once again. I cleaned out my closet the other day, discovering that I have five pairs of flip-flops in varying styles. Sigh. They'll be sitting there for a couple more months before I get to wear them. 

sigh some more.
Brian Lutz says:
February 23, 2009 at 1:01 pm

And here's Seattle's token excessively huge art object, Hammering Man, complete with kung-fu grip:

http://www.phoons.com/hammering.html

I suppose the Fremont Troll could pass for this category too...

Baby M says:
February 23, 2009 at 1:03 pm

“Prairie Home Companion” used to be funny … say, about 1986 or so, when Garrison Keillor still had some affection for the Midwest and the people who live there. IIRC, he “retired” and they replaced the show with a cheap imitation containing Noah Adams as its sole active ingredient—I can’t remember what it was called officially, but we called it “A Prairie Clone Companion.” Unfortunately, Keillor had his sense of humor surgically removed during his “retirement,” which has resulted in his “Old Scout” op-eds and other offenses against good taste.

Mike Gebert says:
February 23, 2009 at 1:25 pm

God, I'd totally forgotten the inert Noah Adams version. It was the most wrongheaded choice for a variety show since Howard Cosell had one.

One thing to give to the Oscars, they apparently banned every Bush joke possible, so as to prevent the show imploding in an audience-repelling orgy of self-congratulation.

Paul J. Marasa says:
February 23, 2009 at 3:58 pm

Well, perhaps a little doomngloom is called for.

I live in a town that until the mid-'80s was a thriving manufacturing center: Lawn Boy, Maytag, etc. People managed the factories, or helped manage them, or labored in them—and most of them owned property, bought cars regularly, etc. But then the jobs headed to Mexico/Asia—where labor prices matched those of, say, the 1850s or so—and Main St. died, then the mall, then the secondary supermarket chains, then the regular-sized Wally Mart. Now, maybe the empty Maytag factory's going to be turning out wind-power turbine blades sooner or later, but I have a funny feeling that—for larger small towns like ours (we're about 32000 souls)—it's going to be lower-paying service jobs from now on.

Yes, economies cycle; but I'm afraid that when some things go—like a robust manufacturing sector—they tend not to come back.

Robert says:
February 23, 2009 at 5:56 pm

Since no one else brought it up or in, I wish to add:


My favorite ‘gazebo’ related online piece, and one I think of every
time Mr. Lileks mentions his gazebo.

Lileks says:
February 23, 2009 at 7:48 pm

Hah:

ED: It's not good, Eric. It's a gazebo.
ERIC: [pause] I call out to it.

There's my experience last year in a nutshell.
Comments have turned out well, and I thank you – this is just what I’d hoped. Almost to 4K in the blog’s brief run. That doesn’t count some of the... intently focused spam I’ve had recently. My spam, let me share it with you:

made some good points. I did a search on laxative use and found most people agree with your blog.

I don’t doubt it one bit. The next one:

There is obviously a lot to know about laxative list. I think you made some good points in

Laxative List? Is that when you’ve consumed so much laxative you lean to one side? I don’t recall making any good points in, but I never read what I type. Says another constive patron, pant-button about to pop from the accumulation of unevaluated by-products:

There is obviously a lot to know about colonic wash. I think you made some good points in

Wasn’t Coloniquash the movie about a world out of balance? Or a mass-
produced Soviet rifle? Once again, it seems I made some good points in, and another comment agrees:

After this post I think different!

Well, I am using a Mac. Later, an interesting note from someone who was browsing internet searching:

Hi, I was browsing Internet searching for short hair cuts for black women and your blog regarding came my way. Very interesting! You really do know your thing! I’m gonna bookmark you and come back in a few to see your new posting! Looking forward to! Cheers!

Frankly, I'm a little insulted that he had to browsing internet searching to find me; I've long regarded this site as the authority on short hair cuts for black women, and it's not for nothing I have to get awards for blog regarding.

This fellow seems shy about his spam subject, but unloads at the end – and I don't mean in the Coloniquashi sense:

Hi. I think you could also make more of it through a bigger exposure about "". Perhaps you can have some who invented cocoa puffs.

It reminds me of an old thesaurus entry for Stupid. It was a public-domain version someone had thrown together and sold for a buck, and had no references past 1945. It didn’t have “he's not rocket scientist.” It did have “He who did not invent gunpowder.” I loved that. You could see someone sitting around in Deadwood in the 1880s, looking at a dimwitted rube who'd rolled into town. Well, there's one who didn’t invent gunpowder. I’d like to think they said “It doesn't take a gunpowder inventor to know that,” but probably not.

So who did invent cocoa puffs? The spammer left a web address, but I'm sure it injects your computer with an overdose of Reanimator chemicals and turns it evil. So never mind. Be secure! I’ll be here, standing guard on the ramparts, ever vigilant. Sleep well in your beds knowing that rough sysadmins are willing to bulk delete enticements for amorous zoo follies.

A few weeks ago I found some slides of a 1950s Mexican vacation at the
antique store. I sorted through the batch until I lost interest – why do people shoot the sea and the sky? we always think the pictures will bring the vacation back to life, but they never do. I bought a half-dozen.

Later I discovered my fancy new $100 scanner doesn't do slides. Well. The old scanner did. So I dug it out . . .and discovered I'd tossed the drivers. Downloaded the drivers, put them on the laptop, because I intended to take the scanner to the office. I can either sit around with my thumbs a-twiddle waiting for a scanner, or I can proceed with Operation Oh To Hell With It and set up my own workstation. Otherwise I'd have to wait for the Mac I was promised long ago, and then I'd have to petition for admin access. The idea of not having admin access to my own machine is like being married to someone who wears a chastity belt and gave the key to someone else. In HR.

So I set up my own shop. I should note that I have finally, finally after all these years, been attached to a Team at the paper. I've been hanging out there, a lone molecule orbiting nothing, as long as I've been there. Now? Digital. Blogging, video production, music, and the SuperSecret project. I love it. Some days it means mornings that begin much earlier than I'm used to, and I find myself at 9 AM coveting a second breakfast – something that's hard to resist when you know you can get scrambled eggs, toast and bacon upstairs for two-and-a-quarter. Those are practically Valli prices from 1981. They have hashed browns, too. The temptation of working one floor below the certainty of hashed browns is sometimes too much to bear.

Anyway. I hooked up the scanner, and discovered the tantalizing lie of slides: they look so wonderfully sharp when you hold them up to the light, and blur out when you scan them. I've tweaked everything, but you can't get around the limitations of the source material. That said, I present details from the slides of Mexico, some time in the 50s. I've scanned them at the largest possible resolution, zoomed in, and picked out images which could be the bones of a dozen stories.

This one was almost beyond saving, but turned out mysterious. I'm pretty sure he was a hired killer, or a retired hired killer.
A town, somewhere, after the rain. Reform and Pepsi:
The pole in the middle is the most significant change in the last 100 years, probably:
She swore she had seen him before, but he was gone before she knew for sure:
Finally: a Family Man.

Lots more to come, here and at buzz.mn. See you there now, and here later.
40 RESPONSES TO **tuesday, feb. 24**

**Jim Treacher** says:
February 24, 2009 at 1:22 am

It's long been rumored that a lifetime battle with irritable bowel syndrome fueled the tormented music of Franz “Laxative” Liszt.

**Ryder Duncan** says:
February 24, 2009 at 2:40 am

Sadly, the all-knowing and never-inaccurate Wikipedia has nothing to say about the corporeal inventor of Cocoa Puffs aside from the fact that the cereal was introduced by General Mills in 1958. Oh, and a Google search for “who invented cocoa puffs” returns this blog as its third result.

I've been getting a log of spam messages that say “I think you are thinking like sukrat, but I think you should cover the other side of the topic in the post too...”. Who is this mystic Sukrat of whom you speak? I wonder...

Thank goodness for Akismet.

**mpbk** says:
February 24, 2009 at 3:12 am

My parents took tons of slides. Unfortunately, they took so many that they often went through and tossed some of them because they didn't have enough space for all those round slide trays.

One time when looking through them, I noticed a bit of rot or mold growing in the corners of a couple of them. So I bought a slide scanner and my just-retired father scanned in all 3000 or so of them.

Like yours, they are resolution limited, however, the biggest disappointment was the dust which I found nearly impossible to remove. I think the slide projector with its blast of heat sort of welded some of the dust to the slide material itself.

My parents were big fans of the World Fairs and went to a few of them, and they got the pix to prove it. Pretty cool space-age stuff.

**Joe Bobe** says:
February 24, 2009 at 3:29 am

You can only get resolution as good as the camera/lens that made them. There's a lot of us who shoot slide film, and I could show you some scans that are sharp enough to slice bread with.

**shesnailie** says:
February 24, 2009 at 4:28 am

_@_v – enny pix of the oklahoma pavilion at the 64/5 ny worlds fair? any pix in general of the 64/5 ny worlds fair?

**shesnailie** says:
February 24, 2009 at 4:30 am

_@_v – oh and it's amazing how deep spammers will sink to promote their krep. they'll even raid guestbooks on little geocities sites.
because apparently there's legions of people who'll click on a link buried in a guestbook. eventually had to resort to moderating the one attached to one of my pages.

GardenStater says:
February 24, 2009 at 5:03 am

“…I found some slides of a 1950s Mexican vacation at the antique store.”

You mean somebody went all the way to Mexico, and then spent the whole time inside an antique store? Much as I love antique stores, that sounds kind of boring...

Pete says:
February 24, 2009 at 5:36 am

You need a better scanner. Flatbeds are not the hardware of choice to scan negatives or slides. Unfortunately, that means something by the likes of Nikon that costs more than $1,000 new. Film/slide scanners come with software that will remove the scratches and dust from the digital image too.

Or click on that ad at Shorpy and ship the slides to India.

Karla Duffy says:
February 24, 2009 at 5:58 am

James, my husband drives a handicap bus for the city. He's having lunch at 9am. If he gets to stop here for a break, he gets bacon & eggs. Supper at 2, bedtime is 5:30 or 6. So your second breakfast sounds perfectly reasonable in this household.

Jeff says:
February 24, 2009 at 6:30 am

Picture with pole in middle? Try 300 years . . . cool stuff, thanks for putting in the effort. The images will swim around in my brain for the day if that helps rationalize the time you put into the project!

ed in texas says:
February 24, 2009 at 6:52 am

Coloniquash… he was in ‘Last of the Mohicans’, wasn’t he. Something about ‘warrior who never shows up on time, and is always off in the bushes somewhere’. Not having admin access on your own workstation is not unlike being a Moonie or Davidian cultist, in that on random days the weird kid with the strange hair comes by, pops out his ear buds, and says today you get to talk to you wife. But that's all.

Patrick says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:06 am

Spammers are craftier now than they were 10 years ago. I also run a WordPress blog (not as active as yours, sadly) and I've been hit with many a spam.

One of the most craftiest ways I've seen was through Instant Messenger. I remember one day sitting in the living room, dozing...
off, when I heard the familiar *ring* my Instant Messenger gave off whenever someone wanted to chat with me. I went into the computer room, thinking it was a friend wanting to go out somewhere, but imagine my shock when the first line read “Congratulations.” The spammer/phisher went on to say I was a benefactor, and that I was going to receive so many millions of dollars. Basically it was a Nigerian 419. I reported them to my Instant Messenger provider, blocked them, the whole nine yards.

As for slides, I remember in 6th grade my teacher showing us slides from her trip to Australia and New Zealand.

If you can clean those slides up, that would be a great new page for the site. Maybe a satirical look at traveling to Meixco, with your own personal touch. Probably do some research on some of the locations depicted on the slides. I’m sure some of those slides are labelled as to what they are, possibly with whoever’s in the shot as well, like Uncle Jeff in front of some temple or Memaw and Pepop in front of El Rey de Hamburguesa. I don’t think anyone would mind, since the slides ended up in an antique store anyway.

rdh says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:15 am

This morning's gem:
“The idea of not having admin access to my own machine is like being married to someone who wears a chastity belt and gave the key to someone else. In HR.”

I gotta remember to say that when the jack-booted I.T. thugs come and take away admin rights on my machine. Not that it will make any difference, I just will have something pithy to say to the Man, man. (Of course, I'll credit you, James.)

Mike Gebert says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:26 am

I like the spam that tries to sound normal and suck up to me:

“Good points but do not you think you are forgetting about thing of dsfkjhdskj? Nonetheless good of write!!”

Because that's so flattering to me as a blogger, I probably won't notice that your Christian name is Throbbing-Satisfaction-Guaranteed.com.

Nancy says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:41 am

People seem to be avoiding this photographer–walking or looking away. There is a paranoiac feel to the photos, as if something is about to happen.

Bill says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:48 am

The biggest problems with slides is for whatever reason they faded quite quickly.

My Dad has a large number of family vacation slides taken in the mid 1970s that are just about completely gone. They could probably be brought back with an hour of Photosop time each, but those photos of 1975 Lincoln, Nebraska just aren't worth the effort.
Now, if I could ever get around to scanning the hundreds of color negatives from that same era that seem to be hanging in there, that would be different...

Gray Hackle says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:53 am

I bought a little slide scanner for hundred bucks. It only does three at a time but it's much better than fooling with a flatbed. Those slides were deteriorating and my folks are gone now so I felt that I needed to save the memories. Gave a CDR copy to each of my three brothers so maybe one will survive.

Chris Gumprich says:
February 24, 2009 at 8:09 am

“This one was almost beyond saving, but turned out mysterious. I'm pretty sure he was a hired killer, or a retired hired killer.

Look, it's William S. Burroughs!

swschrad says:
February 24, 2009 at 8:11 am

Slides are intrinsically good material to work with. I processed a bargeload of 'em myself, printed some on both Ciba and Kodak paper. 60s Ektachromes were a little pointillistic, but E6 really sharpened the film up in the 70s.

I periodically toy with the idea of scanning mine and the folks' output, time's a-wasting. I'm thinking I will have a little fun with tax refund time this year. The 16mm in the basement has survived excellently, so the slides should be in great shape as well.

I have taken the first run at using the flatbed, the software does not have its collective act together. So it's going to be a minolta or nikon scanner I'll be looking for.

hpoulter says:
February 24, 2009 at 8:16 am

I was broosing the Internets and came across your most pleasurable and agreeable blog posting comments. I quite agree with your thoughtful points about TARGETMATCHBOOKMOTEL and wish to cherish your news of an amazing and guaranteed new way to get Obama Stimulus Moneys for your blogsite. Please visit my blogging web at http://www.VeryImportantInfos.cn for soon informations.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 24, 2009 at 8:21 am

Laxative List? Is that when you've consumed so much laxative you lean to one side?

Counter flooding will correct that list. You may be a bit down at the keel, but, you know, ya gotta do what ya gotta do.

Gene Dillenburg says:
February 24, 2009 at 8:23 am

Pretty much everyone over the age of 20 in those slides is now dead.
Mike Gebert says:
February 24, 2009 at 8:27 am

Apropos of nothing, I live in Rahm Emanuel's district, meaning my phone rings every two minutes with a robo-call for one of our 78 possible next Congressdroids, and now whenever someone starts to tell me about Sara Feigenholtz or John Fritchey I answer them with an accented voice and political opinions of the 1910s:

“Sara Feigenholtz will cure cancer–”

“No Feigenholtz! Is tool of Eastern speculators and revanchists!”

“John Fritchey is endorsed by Jesus–”

“What about the gold standard! Where does he stand on crucifying our farmers on a cross of silver?”

I like to think that they're testing both of those with focus groups right now for a last minute ad blitz.

Alec says:
February 24, 2009 at 9:02 am

I'm surprised how good a job you do keeping the comments cleaned up. What's going to happen to all the old posts you no longer check? I suspect from my own experience that those will unfortunately get flooded with junk. Can you get some kind of image verification system or something for this WordPress thing? Or perhaps just require registration?

rdh says:
February 24, 2009 at 9:21 am

Alex et al…
recaptcha might be a good one to use. Helps fix OCR'd books and stops spambots. Two birds with one stone as it were…

http://recaptcha.net/

Baby M says:
February 24, 2009 at 9:23 am

I make once-a-week contributions to a group blog on automobiles that runs on TypePad, and I have to say that their built-in comment spam filter is pretty good at cutting the bad guys off at the pass. The only things that seem to regularly leak through are the ones who put their name and/or product description as the commenter name and put in a URL. There's a trucking firm called “National Transport” and an auto parts seller called “Drivewire” that seem to be the worst offenders—but I have to give the folks selling “Wedding Dresses for Men” points for creativity.

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 24, 2009 at 11:16 am

Wow, Jim Treacher is lurking 😊

Spent a week last winter scanning slides that my wife's late father took in the 50s and 60s. I was pleased that I got anything.

Cute pics of my wife when she was a kid that I had never seen. Also,
her dad was an engineer so, there are pics of many things under
construction at the time that seem old today.

Susan says:
February 24, 2009 at 3:35 pm

I always wondered why people would sell old family photos in
antique shops. Couldn't figure out, for the life of me, why anyone
would want a picture of someone unknown to them.

However, I got quite a laugh out of a film I once saw (can't
remember the name), wherein the family had a collection of old
framed photos on a hallway wall. Sure enough, they didn't know the
subjects in the pictures -- they used it as a conversation piece

Hangtown Bob says:
February 24, 2009 at 6:02 pm

“So who did invent cocoa puffs?”

Well......, I don't know. But, I do know and am friends with the man
who invented “Captain Crunch”. So, do you want to know who that
is?

Mikey NTH says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:02 pm

The ‘reform pepsi’ slide has a proto-mime in it.

If they knew then what we know now…

In Re: slides. A good camera store can do wonders. I took in some
old, big, early 20th century family studio pics in to be reproduced.
They did -- beautifully. On one, the chemicals were coming apart,
‘silvering' and they were able to make clear, good copies of it, of
both. And they remounted the originals back into their frames,

Mikey NTH says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:04 pm

BTW – If you don't have this site donated to the Smithsonian in your
will, you should. A chest in the Nation's attic, as it were.

Mikey NTH says:
February 24, 2009 at 7:07 pm

Susan – A lesson to write down the day/date/month/year on the back
of family group photos, and who everyone is.

And to have someone write down a history of everyone.

s. mcgreal says:
February 24, 2009 at 8:53 pm

Concerning the “hired killer” slide: I think William S. Burroughs
was still down in Mexico at that time.

Eric M. Williams says:
February 24, 2009 at 9:47 pm
Those are pretty bad scans. I see a lot of horizontal artifacting – not sure where that's coming from. If you look beyond the artifacts, the source material seems like it might be really good; you should check with one of the photogs at the Trib.

By the way, the problem with the first slide (hired killer) might be that you had the shiny emulsion side facing the wrong way (i.e., away from the sensor assembly). That being said, I don't remember the correct orientation.

Eric in Seattle

Dianna says:
February 24, 2009 at 10:32 pm

Love the Mexican slides – the colors, the architecture, the mood of them. My parents were ardent slide takers and travellers during the mid century years. Maybe because they lived all their days on flat land in a cold country, they were fascinated with mountains and tropical foliage – and felt compelled to gather hundreds of slides of these subjects. The slides were passed down to me, and after culling out all the scenery-only shots, scanned hundreds of them into Picasa from Google. The cool thing was that I could lighten up the dark pictures and see details that had been lurking in the shadows for 50 or 60 years!

shesnailie says:
February 25, 2009 at 1:30 am

found a really good flickr page of family photos with the stories behind them called ‘mom’s world’ at this url

http://www.flickr.com/photos/joeyharrison/sets/1071542/

watch this entry doesn't post for a week when everyone's moved on something else

Michael Rittenhouse says:
February 25, 2009 at 8:54 am

All my clever commentary here, and all you can find quote-worthy is spam.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
February 25, 2009 at 1:49 pm

P.S. “Reforma” refers to the 1855-1876 upheaval whereby the Mexican people threw off the chains of one dictatorship and embraced a suffocating, European-style socialist state instead.

Of course, that wasn’t their intent. Now they’re simply voting with their feet, as it were.

Nonetheless, “Reforma” was once an exalted concept in Mexico. Now it’s just a slogan that rings about like “Great Society” does here. Except it’s still plastered all over everything.

Dianna says:
February 25, 2009 at 10:10 pm

Hey shesnailie, thanks for the link to “moms world”. Old b&w’s like these are magical!
Ross says:
February 26, 2009 at 2:54 am

Go ahead, ask me who invented both Cocoa Puffs and sarcasm...
_I_ did.
I've run from one damned thing to the other since I got up, and I have nothing to say about any of it. So there. The stuff that's interesting I can't talk about, yet, and the stuff that's been kicking around my head for the last few weeks gets dumped into a screed I'm cooking. So here's a dog:
This is from the new camera.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to edit a video while watching an old Password, and hope this restores my mood. Back in a bit.

Okay. Ed Driscoll noted something today – a webpost about the Mayor of San Francisco being caught with . . . bottled water. Full store here. This sums up with exquisite precision the people we elect to guide our institutions:

- Fix on something small and symbolic, and demonize it;
- Propose a response that does little to address the fundamental problem;
- Forbid the thing to others;
- Reserve its use for yourself;
- Adopt a penitent tone when caught which underscores the hypocrisy and makes you look like a dweeb for apologizing for something which, while petty, you have infused with moral failings.
I'm not big on shouting HYPOCRITE, for the most part, because failing to do a thing you endorse does not mean the thing you're endorsing isn't a good idea. But that equation changes when it's something they want to take away from you, but reserve for themselves. In any case, it's just laughable to see a weightless fool who, for the sake of public image and sending the right messages, has to apologize for having the wrong kind of water container – and has an aide describe it as an indulgence.

Sir. Six oysters for breakfast with a rasher of bacon is an indulgence. Three showgirls in your lap is an indulgence. Racing a car at high speed on weekends is an indulgence. Having a moral tuning fork that twinges when someone drinks water from a plastic bottle is an affectation. Here's the video. The Happy Guy was removed from the parking ramp roof yesterday, so my chances of getting more footage are over. Hail and Farewell, Charlestone Balloon Man.

37 RESPONSES TO wednesday, feb. 25

Warren says:
February 25, 2009 at 3:29 am

That (I assume) sunrise is lovely, and (I assume) Jasper’s pose very sweet.

John Everett says:
February 25, 2009 at 4:13 am

How is Jasper doing? What a magnificent creature he is.

Dave says:
February 25, 2009 at 5:04 am

That's the wacky waving inflatable arm flailing tubeman!

http://www.wackywavinginflatablearmflailingtubeman.com/

Mxymaster says:
February 25, 2009 at 5:20 am

Glad that the Balloon Guy went out on a high note. He might have
ended with a buck-n-wing or a samba, maybe the chacha. But the Charleston always leaves ‘em wanting more.

**GardenStater** says:
February 25, 2009 at 5:39 am

Just goes to show you—set to the right, jaunty music, just about anything can make me giggle.

**Tim Windsor** says:
February 25, 2009 at 5:43 am

Warren,

You must be new around here. Lileks up with the sun? The man complains about dragging out of bed at 9 a.m.

😊

My money’s on sunset. Or thirty minutes of Photoshop and Maker’s Mark.

**rbj** says:
February 25, 2009 at 6:50 am

Yes. I never have more than two showgirls on my lap. But then, my frame is on the smaller side and thus doesn’t accommodate more than two.

FWIW, I always found bottled water to be rather silly, I just use a Brita filter (which does affect the taste) and a sports bottle. But as I do this because I am cheap, not environmentally responsible, I guess it doesn’t count.

Jasper is probably waiting for the warm brown ground instead of the cold white ground, all the better for digging in.

**EG** says:
February 25, 2009 at 8:12 am

I love that Jasper picture!

**a reader** says:
February 25, 2009 at 8:16 am

It is interesting that hypocrisy over bottled water gets our host riled up, whereas say, neo-hooverites yelling about DEFICIT SPENDING! when the same people for years said deficits don’t matter doesn’t get a mention.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
February 25, 2009 at 8:38 am

He is a dignified old gent now, isn’t? Striking! Who would have thought from that puppy that was all ears?

Mayor Newsome just might be my next governor. Either he, or the once and future Jerry Brown.

Lovely.
So to sum up today's electeds:
Manufacture a crisis
Manufacture outrage
Manufacture over the top response, but not a solution.
Manufacture a restriction of some right, but reserve it's full enjoyment for yourself.

Got it.

Who said we don't have a manufacturing base in the United States anymore?

Jeff says:
February 25, 2009 at 9:33 am

Newsome was drinking out of a water bottle *ironically*, folks, as a kind of po-mo commentary on the pointlessness of drinking out of a water bottle.

So it's all good.

Speaking of PoMo, is everyone enjoying Mayor Oscar Goodman's indignant pushback to the Obama administration on “trips to Vegas”? Oscar was at his best Animal House judicial council speechifying — “we are an engine for prosperity and recovery and i for one will not just stand here while someone runs down prosperity and recovery! Who is with me?”

Al Federber says:
February 25, 2009 at 9:35 am

San Francisco Mayor Newsom is not well-liked in San Francisco. “Weightless fool” sums him up, from what I can gather. He's running for Governor now.

Angie B. says:
February 25, 2009 at 9:35 am

I just finished reading Orwell's “Animal Farm.” I think you summarized the plot nicely in this post.

Kristin says:
February 25, 2009 at 10:14 am

Quality editing on that video. Very nice.

JoAnne says:
February 25, 2009 at 10:21 am

Your dog is absolutely precious – what a sweet picture. I can’t believe he's asleep on the snow like that!

I read your earlier posts about him. I hope he is doing well. He looks like a lovely dog, and I wish him all the best. 😊

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 25, 2009 at 10:56 am

Thought we had a good “gotcha” moment with a nanny state type until I realized it was Newsom. It would not surprise me if that guy owned large amounts of stock in Arrowhead water.
Cheats on wife, cuckold, shames you for candy bars and then over drinks (alcohol), oh, yeah, my choice for next governor.

**Lileks says:**
February 25, 2009 at 11:03 am

I'm agin it. That said, there's a good argument to be had about the amount and purpose of deficit spending, but that wasn't what the post was about. It's often unwise to draw inferences about THIS from a post about THAT, or assume that someone doesn't care about THIS because he happened to write about THE OTHER THING.

**brook says:**
February 25, 2009 at 11:28 am

long time reader, first time poster. just had to say how much i love the photo of jasper – it's amazing how sweet and content he can look when laying on top of a pile of something so cold and wet.

glad you got the new camera – hope to see more great shots of him as a result!

**Chris says:**
February 25, 2009 at 12:07 pm


I remember ten years ago, when tracking and reporting Muffler Man sightings was all the rage..


**a reader says:**
February 25, 2009 at 12:08 pm

You might want to take your own advice. After all, in your eyes Newsome is guilty of ordering the city not to buy bottled water, and then GASP having bottled water in his car that the city did not pay for. So clearly we can make assumptions about all elected leaders:

“the people we elect to guide our institutions:

Fix on something small and symbolic, and demonize it;

Propose a response that does little to address the fundamental problem;

Forbid the thing to others;

Reserve its use for yourself;”

Which citizens exactly are forbidden from buying bottled water in California?

**roger h (bgbear) says:**
February 25, 2009 at 12:34 pm

a reader:

You are right, let us not judge Gavin on “Watergate”

His wife Jennifer is expecting. I'll wait to see if Jennifer gives
“natural birth,” breast feeds, will Gavin and Jennifer use disposable diapers or organic cotton diapers hand-washed and hung out on the clothesline by the mayor himself. etc.

I suspect they will do what seems most practical to them just like the rest of us.

😊

juanito - John Davey says:
February 25, 2009 at 12:42 pm

roger h (bgbear)
February 25th, 2009 | 12:34 pm

a reader:

You are right, let us not judge Gavin on “Watergate"

His wife Jennifer is expecting. I'll wait to see if Jennifer gives “natural birth," breast feeds, will Gavin and Jennifer use disposable diapers or organic cotton diapers hand-washed and hung out on the clothesline by the mayor himself. etc.

Or, we can see Gavin's wife in her next motion picture!
http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,499924,00.html

Mike Gebert says:
February 25, 2009 at 1:22 pm

Years ago, I went to San Francisco for a week after living under Tiberius Daleyus here in Chicago, and was astonished that the top local news story involved Mayor Willie Brown defending his attendance at a fancy party at which there had been, shall we say, fetish-themed performers, making use of razors on each other, splashing each other with bodily fluids, etc. Brown's response to the controversy was, basically, “How dare you tell me what parties I can go to!” I tried to imagine how many alternate universes I'd have to travel through to find the one in which Mayor Daley would attend an S&M-themed party and then be surprised that anybody questioned it, but the number got too big to keep track of. (The man inspires a lot of questions, but that will never be one of them.)

So that's San Francisco– a place where it's okay for the mayor to watch people pee on each other as long as, Goddess forbid, it's NOT bottled water pee.

Lileks says:
February 25, 2009 at 2:30 pm

“Newsom has issued an executive order banning city departments from buying bottled water, even for water coolers. The ban goes into effect July 1, and will extend to water coolers by Dec. 1.”

MSNBC story here.

Al Federber says:
February 25, 2009 at 3:02 pm

Last year, SF Mayor Newsom proposed forming squads of “garbage police”, who would root through peoples' curbside bins to make sure they were recycling properly. If not, they would be fined.
roger h (bgbear) says:
February 25, 2009 at 3:30 pm

I could understand “a readers” point if the mayor had banned bottle water in City Hall just as a cost cutting measure but, he also endorsed the ban as good for the planet. That is why his using bottle watered strikes me as funny to say the least.

Honestly, I think guys like Newsom do these things as a “keeping up with the Jones” competition with other mayors so they have something to talk about at mayor conferences.

Better them talking about his naked wife 😊

Shopfloor » Blog Archive » Bottled Water and Time for a Self-Criticism Session says:
February 25, 2009 at 4:04 pm

[...] Lileks comments on the ritualized response coming from San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom upon being caught with bottled water! [...]

a reader says:
February 25, 2009 at 4:16 pm

So you think millions of plastic bottles used one time aren’t bad for the planet? What in the world was wrong with picking up a glass and walking over to the sink?

boblipton says:
February 25, 2009 at 4:27 pm

I think the planet will be fine. It's survived dinosaurs, meteors and ice ages. As George Carlin noted, our sole purpose may have been to make the plastics that the planet couldn’t make without us, and now that we've done that, we're the disposables.

Bob

Mike Gebert says:
February 25, 2009 at 4:59 pm

Surely it's possible to believe that wasting lots of plastic is bad, and also that the mayor of San Francisco is a hypocritical, puffed-up jackass. I don't see a contradiction there.

Rob says:
February 25, 2009 at 5:16 pm

Jasper is one handsome dog!

roger h (bgbear) says:
February 25, 2009 at 5:35 pm

“a reader” do you “read”?

Where did anyone here say the message to conserve was wrong?

I tried being nice. I give up on you, you are just here to annoy.

Newsom's a jerk and I don't need a trunk of water bottles to know it.
**BigJohn** says:
February 25, 2009 at 6:36 pm

Not to be technical, but that was not a Charleston. That was more interpretive dance, the likes of which you could see at any Grateful Dead show back when I was a youthful miscreant.

**Ross** says:
February 26, 2009 at 3:36 am

Watching that clip, my guess would be the Balloon Man is gone because he swallowed his tongue.

**Shari** says:
February 26, 2009 at 7:18 am

I meant to tell you the other morning the tube guy had blown a huge hole in his head. I had a feeling he was not long for this world after that.

**jamcool** says:
February 26, 2009 at 9:30 pm

Watching that clip, my guess would be the Balloon Man is gone because he swallowed his tongue.

Nah, he just ran off with the inflatable gorilla with the pink bikini 😛

**Ed Driscoll » Purity Of Essence** says:
February 28, 2009 at 3:35 am

[...] so eloquently phrased it—“corporate water”, James Lileks brilliantly summed up the remarkable puritanism of the “non-judgmental” left: This sums up with exquisite precision the people we elect [...]
I’ll do a lot for my dog, but I draw the line at picking him up because he doesn’t want to walk in the melted snow between the back yard and the back steps. You’re standing in snow! It’s already cold! Plus, you’re a dog! He runs back and forth as though there’s an invisible fence, barking with that incoherent dog irritation. DO SOMETHING. WHAT, I DON’T KNOW.

I don’t like to listen to talk radio or news on the way to the office. Music, maestro, please, and lots of it, loud and fast. On the way to the office this morning I was listening to the “First Wave” channel on XM, which replaced the cool New Wave / Post-punk channel they used to have. The difference seems to be a slightly poppier playlist and a DJ with a British accent – meant, perhaps, to bring back memories of “Downtown” Julie Brown. Wubba wubba. After a “deep cut” from Simple Minds and another from the Psychedelic Furs, they played “Alison” by Elvis Costello. I had an epiphany, related at length on Twitter: it’s a song about killing an old girlfriend. Costello says it isn’t, but he would, wouldn’t he? Who owns up to something like that?

If you can imagine the song sung with the usual bile and grit and pervy nerdy fury you see the meaning. “I don’t know who’s loving you now / I only know it isn’t mine.” Fine. Let’s assume that was a conversation they had a while after a break-up, and he still cares. Or rather he still wants to possess “it.” The next verse: “well I see you got a husband now.” So either this is a later
meeting – he's following her around, perhaps – or his previous statement about “not knowing who's loving you now” is pure willful blindness.

*What do you mean, who's loving me now? I'm married, Declan.*

That doesn't answer my question, Alison.

*Let go of my wrist. You're hurting me.*

The payoff comes in the last verse: “sometimes I think I want to STOP you from talking when I hear the silly things that you say.” So she's talking about kids, PTA, vacations – you know, normal happy human stuff you'd say to someone you used to know. Banalities. But it's not good enough; she's deep, you see, because he's deep, and he loves her, so they should be talking about deep things together, like fascism and war and how everyone else is so stupid for being so happy. The kicker:

“Somebody better put out the big light / 'cause I can't stand to see you this way.”

A mercy killing on intellectual grounds, then. As I said, he denies that's what it's about, but if someone in a noir movie said “He put out the big light” you'd know “he” was dead. It's not as if it wouldn't be consistent with the tone of the man's early oeuvre. I still enjoy the early albums, but it amuses me that we used “Alison” as a slow-dance number in those days. Why, even the New Wave lads could be tender; here's proof!

As I said, the song was probably titled “I Killed The Bride When She Wouldn't Rock and Roll,” and Nick Lowe, over drinks at the local, told him to be a bit more ambiguous, mate. Then Nick stole the title for a song of his own. And a better one, too.

It's not unusual. We all thought “Every Breath You Take” was a love song, too. Turned out it was the Stalker's Anthem.

Ordinary day - thought it was Thursday all day long, and was surprised to find it wasn’t. Part of the problem: I've been shifting work a day ahead, because I have many more things to do now. I can either drop the updates on this site for a while or do them in my idle hours. My copious idle hours.

I do have some. I blew 25 minutes tonight looking at the videos of [Jim the Realtor](http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=1189), a San Diego home-seller who narrates his tours with a sardonic tone that sounds like the absolute least amount of optimism a Realtor can muster in public. They're very funny, and oddly addictive – at least if you're one of those people whose attitude towards the housing bust contains sufficient schaudenfreud for the overbuilt, overpriced, overtaxed parts of America. A tour of one brand-new and already fubar'd neighborhood began with a house whose facade, I believe, sums it all up. Presenting the most anthropomorphically apt house in America today:
Shock, surprise, dismay, it's all there.

The ugliness of some of the houses is just extraordinary. I remember reading with dropped jaw about the housing prices in California, how 900 sq ft metal boxes with cement yards and trains that went through the living room sold for half a million dollars. No one thought that was unsustainable, did they? Oh, it might gently deflate a percentage point or two, but the rules have changed, don't you know. (The moment someone says the rules have changed is the moment you should sell every liquid asset, except your fine whiskeys.)

Well, the rules didn't change, and realty suddenly reminded you that it's spelled like "Reality," minus the I. Goggle this chart of San Diego, if you dare: the last time this much property was underwater, they called it Atlantis.

Watch this one. Listen to the story. Five kids, two acres, 4000 square feet – and no money to feed the family?
In the background, the rote robot chirps of the smoke alarm. No smoke. Just no juice left.

**Today:** Curious Lucre around noon, and Lance Lawson all day at buzz.mn. Sorry for the small Bleatage, but column & other paper duties loom. See you at buzz!

58 RESPONSES TO *thursday, feb. 26*

JJ Hunsecker says:
February 26, 2009 at 10:19 pm

@rch: You're right about The Attractions. But the liner notes for the third (Rhino) reissue of “My Aim Is True” seems to indicate it’s “Steve Goulding and Andrew Bodnar — the rhythm section of The Rumour” (Graham Parker’s band) during the Attractions auditions. Costello writes that they played the same two songs over and over, and “By the end of the afternoon they sounded good enough for a session at Pathway to be scheduled. One of them, “Watching the Detectives” later became my first serious chart single and was obviously not included on the original U.K. release of “My Aim is True”. The newly discovered Steve Nieve — still going under his family name of “Nason” — added the organ and piano parts at an overdub session a few weeks later.”

Costello said in an interview that he was trying to write something that sounded like a Bernard Herrmann score, but that the organ played the orchestral parts because it “was all we could afford.” That was rectified many years later with the orchestral version of “Watching The Detectives” from the album “My Flame Burns Blue,” which Costello says is how he always imagined the song should sound: like a Bernard Herrmann noir score. And if that notion isn’t
catnip to Mr. Lileks, I don’t know what would be.

**GardenStater** says:
February 26, 2009 at 10:28 pm

Lessons learned from my first house (bought for $175K in 1989, sold for $165K in 1999):

1. Don’t assume you’ll be able to flip the house in a year or two—you never know where that boom market is going.

2. Even if you don’t have kids yet, buy in a town that has a good (preferably great) school system.

3. Whatever house you buy, buy with the assumption that you’ll be living there for the rest of your life. In other words, buy a house you really like, at a price that you can afford.

You listening, kids?

**GardenStater** says:
February 26, 2009 at 10:29 pm

Oh, one more thing:

4. If at all possible, buy a property (2-family house, separate rental house) that will allow you to collect rent from someone else that will offset your mortgage payment.

Good luck, folks!

**Bridey** says:
February 26, 2009 at 11:31 pm

Ummmm, rcb, if you think the woman in “Watching the Detectives” is a perpetrator, that is indeed skewed. As in, it doesn’t seem to be supported by the lyrics at all! (And “Alison” is pretty much soaked in hate.)

In “Detective,” you have this:

The detectives come to check if you belong to the parents/  
Who are ready to hear the worst about their daughter’s disappearance/  
Though it nearly took a miracle to get you to stay/  
It only took my little fingers to blow you away

Which makes it clear who the perpetrator is: It is the narrator, speaking from his warped noir fantasy.

The woman is guilty only of not realizing she lives with a crazy person. Whether her TV shows are the origin of his fantasies is not made explicit — his delusions could be a response to her ignoring him in favor of those hard-hearted noir heroes, or she may just be watching TV.

To each his own, but I do think you have it backwards!

**Jim A** says:
February 27, 2009 at 5:47 am

To the extent that Elvis is an invention of Declan’s, his persona and musical styles were works in progress during the first tour — but his musical style is still evolving. But even in ’77-’78, I think he must
have known he didn't want to be pigeonholed into any single sound. He'd recruited the Attractions in part for their versatility, after all, and for their eclectic musical tastes and backgrounds. He not only could have become a country star, he essentially did, with Almost Blue — after having been an R&B star with Get Happy!, a pop storyteller with Trust and Imperial Bedroom, and an angry young man with This Year's Model.

And all the songs on My Aim Is True, while often incredibly bouncy and fun, all have distinctly dark themes. All of them. Frustration, anger, guilt, shame. There isn't a single lyric that can be called upbeat, much less an outright love song, despite the catchy tunes. And while not as dense as they are on This Year's Model or the amazing Armed Forces, there are several instances of double-meanings and wordplay. There's “loving some body (somebody)” and the rest of the examples cited above in Alison; “no such thing as an original sin” (Not Angry), the noir-ish double entendres (“close-up of the sign that says ‘We never close’,” etc.) in Watching the Detectives, and so on.

The My Aim Is True outtake Radio Sweetheart, since restored as a CD bonus track, would easily have been the sunniest song on the LP but Stiff Records — not Elvis — rejected it as “too country”. Within a year, Stiff seemingly got over trying to fit Elvis into too tight a mold, and released his cover of Burt Bachrach & Hal David's “I just Don't Know What To Do With Myself” on the STIFFS LIVE package-tour compilation. Elvis's transformation had begun, and it continues to this day.

**rcb says:**
February 27, 2009 at 1:24 pm

JJ- you win. Your research Kung Fu is greater than my Kung Fu.

Bridey- we agree to disagree, although maybe not so much. WtD _is_ a movie, and probably a noir, but that means to me (and everything I know about noirs I have learned unwillingly from Mr. Lileks here) that there's isn't anybody that is wholly good. I think there are three major characters in the song– but first:

- Nice girls, not one with a defect
  - Cellophane shrink-wrapped, so correct
  - Red dogs under illegal legs
  - She looks so good that he gets down and begs

(CHORUS) She is watching the detectives
- “Ooh, he's so cute”
- She is watching the detectives
- When they shoot, shoot, shoot, shoot
- They beat him up until the teardrops start
- But he can't be wounded 'cause he's got no heart

- Long shot at that jumping sign
- Invisible shivers running down my spine
- Cut to baby taking off her clothes
- Close-up of the sign that says “We never close”
- He snatches at you and you match his cigarette
- She pulls the eyes out with a face like a magnet
- I don't know how much more of this I can take
- She's filing her nails while they're dragging the lake

To me this sounds like she's not so good. she's more interested in ogling the detective than in worry about whose body is in the lake, and there's some power play going on between her and “he,” who I
think is also a pretty bad piece of work. "He" gets roughly up by the detectives, and I have the sense he kind of had it coming. Going even further into impressionism, I feel that "he" was killed by the detectives and she was getting away scot-free; until "my little fingers" intervened. All this is reading a story into a few hundred words of rhyme, so nobody has it wrong. We just frame it differently.

Jim- I agree mostly with you, as well. The whole of the _demos_ for MAiT were far country and much bouncier, although there were nasty aspects tucked away in there, as well, such as "Raise a White Flag." I think Elvis could have been whatever genre he picked out at the time. The whole point of the "3 1/2 years" bit was there was amazing work done in that period, which he hasn't since surpassed, but which few have ever equaled.

**Bridey** says:
February 27, 2009 at 4:46 pm

Ah, but the "she" in the verses is NOT the live-in, she is the femme fatale of the narrator's private eye fantasy.

I will grant that is debatable — but the dead narrator theory has nothing in the actual words to support it, imho. But these debates are what make the artier side of pop music so much fun! But I'll stop now. Good on ya, rcb!

**BJM** says:
February 28, 2009 at 2:24 am

20 amp service and a ganja closet. Heh.
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

MORE
Thanks for dropping by! Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
This was the day of SNOMAPCALYPTAGEDDON: the cities braced for eight inches of something they call snow, a strange heretofore substance that would fall from the sky and make life so difficult we would be talking about this for years. The power would go out, and we would be forced to heat our homes with fireplaces. The cordwood was stacked like dead people! Rush hour would be a “nightmare,” even though no one ever has nightmares about driving slowly through compacted precipitation in solid form.

We have nightmares about waking up one morning and finding our body has grown fibrous Koosh balls all over, or we find ourselves at a strange version of Times Square’s Hotel Edition, except that the basement is filled with splendid Art Deco design, and has a secret passage that leads to an oddly depopulated New York where ominous men in coats eye you from the mouth of an alley, and you realize you have brick at your back and nowhere to go. Yes, this would be a jolly old storm, a blizzard, a stern lesson in the bitter truths of late winter: it’s never over. Winter is the bogeyman who pops up in the last reel after he’s been killed – and even if his head is removed at the end of the film, he’ll be back in the sequel.

There’s always a sequel.

So how did it go?

At noon I took this picture of the patio. Or used an electron microscope to capture a new virus I’ve discovered. Your call.
The snow began around 12:30; started light, and quickly turned heavy. I had to go to Natalie’s school to read for the Readathon, and took these on the way:
It was miserable stuff – some varieties of snow has an unerring ability to get down your collar no matter how tightly you button up.

At the school I read “Despereaux” to an attentive audience, although my daughter said I was “too dramatic” some times. Everyone’s a critic. At least the kids weren’t totally bored; the teach had shown them one of my Strib videos the day before, and apparently they had enjoyed our patented “hi-jinx,” so I had the wind behind my back. Asked, as usual, how many of them took the newspaper at home. About 3/4s of the hands went up. Interesting note: most looked at the comics; almost no one looked at the weather. My kid does. Loves to see where it’s warm elsewhere.

I took her home, since it was easier than putting her on a bus. On the way out she wanted to show me her locker: pictures of dogs and cats, magnets she liberated from the fridge downstairs. One of them is the old Texaco emblem,
which she connects to Grandpa. I love to see that. He hasn’t been with Texaco for years – switched to Conoco when Texaco left the market. That was a lateral move, I guess; one venerable red brand for another. Then Conoco left, and now we’re with Tesoro, a brand unknown to the Twin Cities. He’ll always be a Texaco Man, as far as I’m concerned.

Anyway. The walls were decorated with class projects about famous people. These were interesting:

We can all agree on #3, perhaps. John Lennon? Isn’t this like kids in the 70s writing a paper about Al Jolson? Then there’s this:

Drove home, finished a column. No great satisfaction with this one. Then off through the snow to karate. I walked next door to the coffee shop, noting with small satisfaction that the sign in the window listed the hours of operation. The other side has the usual “Sorry we missed you, but we’re
closed” text, and for weeks that was the side that faced out. No one turned it around in the morning. One day I finally turned it around myself – not out of some sense of civic duty, but because it disturbed the universe. Or rather my universe. Same diff. I usually order a dark roast, give them one of the many gift cards I’ve accumulated over the years, answer the trivia question for a dime off the total (“What is the capital of Star Wars? A) Wookietown, B) Trantor, C) Coruscant, D) Liberty City”) and try a free sample of some pastry I’ll never buy. Today I was greeted by giant urns with a handmade sign: FREE COFFEE.

This rather defeats the point, doesn’t it? I asked, and they said they’d had a big catering order cancel, presumably because of the weather. Help yourself; it was this or pour it out. To which I wanted to say, well, good God, man, pour it out. Even if they didn’t pay you, this isn’t helping the bottom line.

I pulled 12 ounces of dark roast, and bought a pastry. Really, do I have to do everything by myself here to keep you in business?

At Karate I read “Cinnamon Kiss” by Walter Mosley, and kept an eye on her karate moves. At the end of the day she had a huge advance: THREE stripes. Big grins. Supper at Subway, with Daddy’s usual boring lecture about the buildings on the wallpaper.

Home, work. Another column to write. About what, I don’t know; my mind’s been in eight places all week, thanks to the SuperSecret Project.


But that’s for later. For now: there’s the now-traditional Friday Lance up at buzz.mn; 100 Mysteries should be popping up around noon, with Evening Commercial Break later in the day. Friday! Enjoy, and see you soon.

Oh: Strib column.

Oh: the snow, at 11 PM. They didn’t tell me we’d be hit by ping-pong balls.
MaryIndiana says:
February 27, 2009 at 2:14 am

I am a bit taken aback by those class projects on famous people.

I came from the Bobbs Merrill era. The biographies we had were all of the “Abe Lincoln–Young Rail Splitter” variety. The books were all cheerful and glossed over anything unpleasant or controversial.

It must make it more interesting for the teacher to have to explain about dealers mixing heroin with baby powder!
Craig McAndrew says:
February 27, 2009 at 4:16 am

We were promised a “weather event” in December, which turned out to be a bit of dull drizzle. Snow fell in January which, according to the newspapers, “brought the country to a standstill.” The country being London.

Greetings from Scotland, btw. I’m enjoying your bleatings.

Bill says:
February 27, 2009 at 4:42 am

James, I’d be curious to hear your thoughts on the death of another newspaper, as today’s the final issue of the (Denver) Rocky Mountain News, two months shy of its 150th year in business.

http://www.rockymountainnews.com/

hpoulter says:
February 27, 2009 at 5:53 am

Baby powder? I think it was baby formula. Talcum powder in the veins would probably not enhance the experience. (not that I know anything about that).

So, Monday Noon the big super-secret project is unveiled, eh? My calendar is marked.

Patrick says:
February 27, 2009 at 7:03 am

I think it was cocaine in baby powder, heroin in baby formula. Cocaine powder blends so well with baby powder, or even flour. Heroin is usually in liquid form before being consumed, so it mixes well with baby formula.

…Not that I would know anything about this.

Be glad you’re not living down here in Georgia during the SNOMAPOCALYPTAGEDDON. Here it would be more of a SNOWPOCALYPTAGEDDOPHANY. I think I covered bad weather in Georgia on my blog.

Nancy says:
February 27, 2009 at 7:49 am

Sigh, I wouldn’t mind a little snow. The kind we usually get here in GA. Everything stops for a day. The kids break out sleds from who-knows-where and tiny snowmen form. By the afternoon the streets are drying as the temperature rises above freezing and everything goes back to normal by the next day. Unfortunately we are about due for a snow/ice event. Those get dicey.

HunkyBobTX says:
February 27, 2009 at 7:58 am

5. John is the walrus.
6. John’s no-talent wife broke up the Beatles.
7. John was shot on the way home.
8. John said he was more popular than Jesus.
9. John had a lost weekend.
10. John saw a UFO.
11. John was weird.

swschrad says:
February 27, 2009 at 8:31 am

nightmares. the other night, I had one. hosting some home
improvement show, clearing out The Project Room, and it fell to me
to carry the bobcat. yes, the big folding cage that took up a whole
wall was being unscrewed and folded up, and I had to carry the
bobcat. as in snarling ball of vicious fur.

by hand, there was no transfer cage. held by the back, nasty-
business end pointed away, head up, squeezing through the bones
on either side of the spine.

and there was no destination cage, which nobody thought of until I
was outside the bathroom. “can't throw this cat in there, he'll claw
out and kill us.”

now everybody's concerned.

NOW the bobcat starts screaming, squirming, the claws and teeth
are out, and all I can do is squeeze harder.

wakey-wakey.

and all I could think of for the next half-hour is, “oh, that poor, poor,
hurting cat.”

Paige says:
February 27, 2009 at 8:34 am

Patrick, I'm down here in Albany, Georgia (aka “Hell's Waiting
Room”) and I WISH we had snow, EVER, because living here is like
having Kobe Bryant's postgame socks permanently duct-taped to
your face. Floods, we can have. Bugs big enough to carry luggage?
Check. But no snow.

Preptile says:
February 27, 2009 at 8:51 am

Having compactable parcels of weather all over the neighborhood
hit
lots of the north country this year . As usual, ya'll got the worst of it.
As well as plenty o' Houston's pity.
Not nearly so tundraesque , our weather can only be poured .
Known variably as rain, humidity and sweat it all runs downhill,
towards my shorts.
We did not freeze at all , memorably, this year. That will bring
bumper mosquito crops .
I miss the snow from my college years, the astonishing beauty , crisp
air ,
and fresh smell that are a daily part of your world all winter .
Having 4 seasons would astonish most here, for the most part, all we
get is some minor variable of Summer . (This does not disuade us
from playing 'winter rules' at the golf course , 7/5 thru 7/3 annually).
Pretty much it is all golfin weather here tho .
266.5 rounds in a year is my personal record , at least 95% played in
shorts.
Maybe it is not quite available 24/7/365, more like 14/7/330, if you are
so afflicted.
In anticipation of winter I have had the fireplace loaded and ready
for 2 years.
Long range forecasts predict a day of winter either next year, or soon thereafter.
This is not so much Global warming, just Texas.
As a dedicated Bleat reader I have enjoyed starting my days here, forever (it seems).
Such snowballs to the face as Gnat would deliver, or you in columns written on winter
are the stuff of dreams for someone who has only seen snow a few times.
TV says Fargo is 2 degrees, and buried. Minneapolis is probably the same.
I would offer a trade of snow for oppressive heat w the Gnatagirrl, but on passing in the mail they would probably wet those cardboard boxes until the labels were unreadable, and then where would we be?
Back here bleating about it, that is where!
As always James, thank you for writing.

Sundog says:
February 27, 2009 at 9:12 am

You NEVER get advance warning that you're going to be hit by ping-pong balls. Just ask the Captain.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSpPyTNSITU

Gibbering Madness says:
February 27, 2009 at 9:31 am

Greetings from Scotland, btw. I'm enjoying your bleatings.

When I lived in St. Andrews it once got down to a temperature so heart-stoppingly cold that it is best expressed as 281 Kelvin. I didn't quite feel like wearing a short-sleeved shirt, but it was rather amusing to see the English undergrads staggering around in heavy coats and scarves.

Moishe3rd says:
February 27, 2009 at 9:32 am

Immediate answer that popped into my head was “Trantor.” Which, of course, popped right back out because that was the capital of the Empire in Asimov’s Foundation series. Not being a Star Wars geek, I would guess Coruscant? But, it’s probably “Liberty City,” what with the whole Space Opera thing of Star Wars…

I refuse to Google it. Refuse, I say!

Kaptain Krude says:
February 27, 2009 at 9:51 am

So what was the answer? I hope it was “Wookietown.”

Gotta move on
Gotta move on
Won’t you take me to Wookietown?
Won’t you take me to Wookietown?
Won’t you take me to Wookietown?
Won’t you take me to Wookietown?
Gotta move to a town that's right for me
A town that's got the right kind of Jedi energy.

(My deepest apologies to George Lucas)

V the K says:
February 27, 2009 at 10:07 am

Mr Lileks, I tried to email you about this, but your box was full. While rooting around in my mom's attic, I came across a 1969 copy of the World Book Yearbook. It's in battered shape, but as a cultural artifact, it's amazing. There's an article about movies that describes George Lucas as a promising film student. There's an article about the Middle East that makes a one-sentence reference to "challenging new element: terrorism." A model depicting the WTC before it was built. If you'd like to have it, please email me and I'll send it to you.

juanito - John Davey says:
February 27, 2009 at 10:07 am

TMI on the Bill Clinton bio. I never got into the Presidents' parents when we studied them growing up. However my 4 year old came home from Preschool in the Fall and proudly proclaimed that she was endorsing Barack Obama for the Presidency in 2008. I asked her how she knew about Senator Obama, and she said that they talked about him "all day" at school. I asked her if they talked about any other candidates like Senator McCain, and she said, "there's someone else running for President too?"

A footnote: The Palin pick swung both the 4 & 7 year olds.

Dan says:
February 27, 2009 at 10:20 am

Just to be technically accurate... 1 and 3 were probably correct, and 2 and 4 were correct some of the time.

It's a good start for a newbie.

I started listening to the Beatles of the 20th anniversary of Sgt. Peppers. I had a lot to learn.

…and OH MY GOD THAT WAS 20 YEARS AGO!

Dave In Tucson says:
February 27, 2009 at 10:34 am

[beatles-geek] Lennon played rhythm guitar. George played lead. (Paul was bass). [/beatles-geek]

DavelInAz says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:01 am

Sorry I couldn't see the lovely snow in Mpls yesterday. I'm afraid I had a previous engagement:

linda says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:02 am

I went in last week for my son's "I love to read" month. A room full of first graders captivated by the Cat in the Hat and Green Eggs and
Ham. My son's teacher said I was one of the only parents for the class that volunteered. How sad is that? Kids are such an easy audience! Well as long as you get the voices right, they are.

Re: the snow. What a flipping mess. I left work at 2:00 and it took an hour and a half to go 30 miles. Shoveled 3 inches off the sidewalk at 4pm and another 4 inches this morning. Arghh someone drive a stake through winter's heart.

DaveInAz says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:03 am
Oops. Blew the link. Let's try again:

Patrick says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:04 am
HunkyBob, you're wrong. John wasn't the Walrus. The Walrus was Paul. That's a clue for you all.

DaveInAz says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:06 am
Whatever. It was lovely here in AZ.

swschrad says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:31 am
and that's a good thing, too. keep all that lovely warm, dry, pleasant weather down South where it won't wreck our days sliding sideways into buses and falling on our keisters at the mailbox.

one can't have enough weather misery, I always say.

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NOT

swschrad says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:34 am
no, Paul was dead. John couldn't say that. until New York. then he still couldn't say it.

Borf says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:36 am
12. John wrote the best stalker song:

Well I'd rather see you dead, little girl
than to be with another man
You better keep your head, little girl
or I won't know where I am

You better run for your life if you can, little girl
Hide your head in the sand little girl
Catch you with another man
That's the end'a little girl

juanito - John Davey says:
February 27, 2009 at 11:58 am

Dave In Tucson Not just Bass, but left handed? Bass.

Last year I read The Lorax to my daughter's 1st grade class. They were enthralled. When finished, my daughter asked why I had read it in “that voice”: like the news guys on TV. Meaning that I enunciated ev.er.y syl.la.ble such as this – and with my announce baritone. Always leave 'em wanting more, I guess.

M Geiger says:
February 27, 2009 at 12:25 pm

Hey! The Strib link goes straight to the column now.
Thanks.

Umbrick says:
February 27, 2009 at 12:28 pm

12. John complained about security, but didn't actually do anything about it –
http://momentsintime.com/Lennon%20Dakota%20Security%20Concerns.htm

borf says:
February 27, 2009 at 12:39 pm

I was here, but I disappear.

ak13820 says:
February 27, 2009 at 1:15 pm

“The books were all cheerful and glossed over anything unpleasant or controversial.”

That was my first thought, too. I don't think I knew what an alcoholic was (or knew how to spell it) until high school.

Kirk M. says:
February 27, 2009 at 1:25 pm

Thank you for using the most difficult word to pronounce:

SNOMAPOCALYPTAGEDDON

I have spent valuable minutes trying to say this word, and then after it was over, I felt completely disgusted with myself.

Steven says:
February 27, 2009 at 1:46 pm

I didn't know any alcoholics until high school.

Warren says:
February 27, 2009 at 1:59 pm
That first couple of grafs is what hooked me to your style. “The cordwood was stacked like dead people!” Prime stuff, man, a jolt of pure juice to the creative vein.

MaryIndiana says:
February 27, 2009 at 4:31 pm

Baby powder, baby formula... thanks for the education. It makes sense. I think I was so shocked to think the primary source material for book reports these days includes some of the world's harsher realities...

Geeez. Real Life is no Leave It To Beaver Episode, but can we not save some of the truly awful stuff for them to learn about in high school and college?

lanczos says:
February 27, 2009 at 6:17 pm

Criminy, looks cold in Mpls. Here in The Glorious Heroic Peoples’ Revolutionary Soviet of Austin, Texas, we suffered through a record high of 87 degrees Fahrenheit. (But only 60 degrees(F) tomorrow, Saturday.)

I always said that I would LOVE to live in a place that has a *REAL* Fall and a *REAL* Winter – with snow and stuff. Yeah: for about a week.

zefal says:
February 28, 2009 at 3:51 am

“The cordwood was stacked like dead people!”

My father said they would “stack their dead like cordwood” in the Pacific during WW2. Did you get that from your father, Mr. Lileks?
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

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