"You're lucky," my daughter said over breakfast. "You get to stay home."

"Not always," I said. I usually go to the office daily, but I'd decided – in my head! – to work at home today, and she read my mind. "But it's not that great. It gets cold in the house. It's lonely. Just me and the radio." And the low moans of the Black Dog, crouched outside in the snow, grinning horribly. But that goes without saying.

"Still, I wish I could stay home."

"Go to school and learn about Indians."

She went off to school to learn about Indians, and I got to work. Over the lunch hour I took a break to clean out a closet. The dreaded Closet of Shame, the storage closet where things just pile up, no matter how I winnow or sort. Of course, sorting is not helpful; just rearranges the crap. I dug through a box of old journals the other day, looking for something, and was heartened to see that almost half have been seized by mold and rot. Gives me all the more reason to burn them. I can't stand knowing they're down there – volume after volume of sophomoric navel-interrogation, combined with hapless and needlessly attenuated love affairs, spiced with the occasional dalliance that soured or died or blew up in my face. I'll be responsible for everything after 1983. Before that, it's another country. Population, Emo English Major.

Oh, and I'm so much better now! Well, more "grounded," perhaps, but you
could say that about a fellow in an electric chair for a triple murder, too. Or
do they not ground them? Something has to be grounded there. Anyway. Job
One for the lunch hour was going through the drawers of electronic stuff,
again. Did this a few years ago, put everything in bags with helpful labels.
Since then I’ve accumulated duplicates of everything. I have no idea how. You
buy a box of cereal, it comes with RCA plugs red-white-yellow. You buy a
camera, it comes with all sorts of useless cables intended to hook up the
camcorder to the TV. The HDMI cables I set aside; they’re precious. But never
once in my life have I attached a camcorder to a TV. Never had anyone ask
me to do it. Never found myself sitting around someone else’s house, and
thought hey, why don’t you hook up your camcorder to the TV and show us
some recent unedited shaky footage?

Adaptors? I got a million of ‘em. No idea what they’re for. Out they go. Here’s
what I was dealing with:

Yeah. So I reduced that by 2/3rds, got back to work. Daughter came home
from school as I finished; I was sitting on the warm radiator in the living
room (it has a stone cover, which get toasty; Jasper used to sit up on it before
he couldn’t make it up there anymore) and playing Mah Jongg on the iPad
when the bus came. She walked up the sidewalk, bent into the wind, and as
usual I wondered what she was thinking. I could probably guess, but you
never know. It’s one of those things a parent thinks about now and then: I
wonder what it’s like to be her. She’s not a secretive child, and she shares her
interests with me, but you know what I mean. The running fugue that
bubbles in your brain all day long. You know the tune. No one else does.

The Rudolph special was on tonight; didn’t watch it, because we had a piano
recital. Natalie played “Mission: Impossible,” which is pretty tricky, and did
“Carol of the Bells” on a vibraphone. She sat down and muttered “That was
horrible. Fail.” I was torn, somewhat; she had messed up the ending of
Mission the first time, but the second time she nailed it. On the “Carol” she hit
some wrong notes. So what do you do? If your instincts lean towards building self-esteem above all, you lavish praise. If you want to be stern perfectionist father who thinks “she will thank me some day” as you castigate the smallest error, you castigate the smallest error and withhold dessert, I suppose.

Having set up two extremes to reflect well on my moderation, I will now reveal my reaction and hope the self-serving nature of my framing isn’t too obvious.

Crap, the mike is on. You heard that. Anyway, I just said that she messed up the end of the first run-through, did great the second time, and hit some wrong notes on “Carol.” Could have been perfect, but it wasn’t, and it was fine, and certainly not Horrible or deserving of the FAIL stamp. It was your first vibraphone piece! Relax. I’m proud of you.

Is this bad? I don’t think so. If your criticism isn’t true your praise means nothing.

Then Perkins, for breakfast. It’s the tradition before or after a recital. The same clown was there. She’s always there. I could go at 3 AM and she’d be sitting in the corner.

“Don’t make eye contact,” Natalie said when we walked in. “Just don’t.” Clowns! They can smell fear.

So we didn’t watch Rudolph, because we were busy, and it’s on disk, and it was still November, and because . . . oh, because she’s ten, maybe, and ten these days is different. When I was a kid there were four cartoons at night per year, and two of them were Charlie Brown, and one of those had a bizarre sequence about Snoopy going behind enemy lines to have a root beer with Bill Mauldin, or something. Takes the kids right out of the story these days, that does. The Charlie Brown Christmas special was different, because it had a tidy story, music that made you feel safe and happy and warm like nothing else you heard all year long. Then there was Grinch, which was great, and planted little seeds that would bloom years later – it was drawn by Chuck Jones?

That was Boris Karloff? The song was sung by the voice of Tony the Tiger? WOW.

But Rudolph was the best, for reasons I’m sure I’ve discussed here on an annual basis.

Drama. Terror. Suspense. Those Burl Ives songs. (My Dad had the Burl Ives album from which they were taken; it had no connection to the Rudolph show on the liner notes. When I was very young I found the resemblance between the snowman and Burl Ives to be very mysterious, as though there was some marvelous synchronicity at work here.) The 60s archetypes among the elves. The way it all ended and it was over and then after the last commercial there was MORE! as all the Misfit toys were sent off. It was perfect. I even remember the commercials:
Was it better then because there were only a few shows and the commercials were distinctive for having stop-motion animation that mirrored the Rankin-Bass productions, and everything was happy and snowy and magical? Of course not. But I suppose there was something to be said for a time when these things were rare and special, and immediate: no pause, no rewind, no record. It happened. And then it was over. I was there for that at the right age.

If I told my daughter I was lucky to be around when Rudolph was rare, she'd shrug. No, really, I'm lucky.

If I told her I could stay home tomorrow and remix the Rudolph video and sample the dialogue and do a musical fan video, then I'd be lucky.
Hello: it's the end of LA Dining 1962. But as Yoda said: there is another. Have a grand day, and welcome to December! Hope it's the best you've had since you were ten.

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Pass it along, if you wish

93 RESPONSES TO mush

xrayguy says:
December 1, 2010 at 12:58 pm

First, “what your kid is thinking as she walks from the bus against the wind”- Cold, I'm cold, it's cold, I wish it wasn't cold, I want to get out of the cold.... Second, extra cords-Yesterday while cleaning out the storage closet @ the clinic, my boss handed me an otoscope/opthalmoscope (the thing your doctor looks in your ear with) and says, “Toss this”. Me “Can I have it?” OK with the boss. Took it home, no power cord. “Wait, this male end is just like any one of the three power cords I have in that box in my office”- fit perfectly. Now I can look at my own ears in the privacy of my living room.

xrayguy says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:00 pm

@ rbj- Doll was really a GI Joe- don't ask...

xrayguy says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:06 pm

My kid watched Rudolph over and over last winter, and my wife and I came up with alternate very adult dialogue in self defense.

Mrs.ME says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:07 pm

I agree with Bob R. As her teacher I will say this: she's well aware of the groove. She locked it in overall. The more I work with young people and observe their progress toward mastery, the more I advise them this: “100% is attainable but less than 100% is not unacceptable. The goal is doing our best. Tending toward perfectionism myself, I usually assess my own performance by how many mistakes I made. Sadly, I often magnify those errors. I hope Natalie learns early in life the line between 'perfect' and 'job well done'. Fail? Last night? Absolutely not!

juanito - John Davey says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:08 pm

rbj says:
December 1, 2010 at 12:54 pm

In Rudolph, on the Island of Misfit Toys, what was the doll's
problem. Charlie-in-the-box, I get, but why was the doll on the island?

Anticipointment:
http://www.misfittoys.net/tvtime/rudolph/misfittoys/misfittoys.html

bgbear says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:19 pm

I once thought I was clever enough to come up with a piece on more modern misfit toys but, my imagination was limited.

I like the idea above of the DADT G.I. Joe.

best I could do was:

the “Don’t touch me there Elmo”

A radio controlled model of the General Lee that plays “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”

Jason says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:20 pm

“If your criticism isn’t true your praise means nothing”.

That, sir is one for the ages. If I live my whole life and am able to come up with one thing to make it into a 1001 Quotable Quotes book, I’ll be happy.

Pencilpal says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:27 pm

bgbear:
A square Slinky?
Black & white Colorforms?
Sad Putty?

shesnailie says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:28 pm

_@_v – run for your lives! the adapters are massing into an army of vengeancey death!

nixmom says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:38 pm

My dad always commented that Rudolph needed adenoid surgery. (“I'b in-de-BEND-end!”, not “I'm indePENdent!”)

He had a point.

swschrad says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:45 pm

@nixmom: “if oo ad a lite bub jabd in oar node, ood talk funny, too.”

achoo!

ah, rats, it went dark!
misfit reindeer from whatever island is above water that afternoon, now fading into obscurity.

swschrad says:
December 1, 2010 at 1:51 pm

ooh, this is cute. tags, please for “$houle”, “no user serviceable parts”, “cut him off”, and “where’s Lileks?”


bgbear says:
December 1, 2010 at 2:00 pm

I remember once someone suggesting that in the distant future, Christian teaching getting conflated with Holiday specials (could be Lileks, I could have imagined it myself).

There were flying deer on the earth in those days; and also after that, when the bucks of Santa came in unto the does of elves, and they bare fawns to them, the same became mighty bucks with noses that glowed with the Light of Heaven.

xrayguy says:
December 1, 2010 at 2:21 pm

“Don’t touch my junk” Elmo?

swschrad says:
December 1, 2010 at 2:32 pm

overheard in the security line: “I’ll have two sheets of wallets, two of 5×7, and four 8x10s. and say, where did you guys get that whoppin’ big special camera?”

Pencilpal says:
December 1, 2010 at 2:57 pm

Kvetch-a-Sketch.

Pencilpal says:
December 1, 2010 at 3:00 pm

Even our name says ‘Happy Hanukkah.’

bgbear says:
December 1, 2010 at 3:13 pm

tee hee @ all toy suggestions

There was a story about the girl who does the Dora the Explorer voice getting canned because her voiced changed. I see a talking Dora doll that sounds like she going through three packs of smokes and a fifth of scotch each day.
John M. Hanna says:
December 1, 2010 at 4:11 pm

A lot of people have commented about not liking the old Christmas specials. “I don’t care for Rudolph” and “I never got into Charlie Brown” type remarks. But the thing is, despite their choppy animation and stilted dialogue, you still remember them. Unlike the dozens of specials that have come out over the past years, its these ones that have stood the test of time. Sorry to sound like an old grump, but I don’t think the newer, flashier specials are any good. CGI just doesn’t have the charm and human quality of stop motion and hand painted cel animation.
I remember watching these specials when I was a kid, and they were special because they only played once a year. Due to our skewed sense of perception, my brothers and I found things like ‘Rudolph’ and ‘Santa Claus Is Coming To Town’ to be epic in scope. They were like watching the ‘Lord Of The Rings’ trilogy, even though most of them only ran an hour. Even now, with the mass availability of these specials, I still like to keep my viewing of them limited. No need to watch them 20 times on ABC Family throughout December. Once again, to sound like an ornery old coot, the newer specials just don’t click with me. Ever since Rankin-Bass and Charles Schulz have gone away, there hasn’t been any memorable holiday specials. Very often, the newer specials resort to plundering the old ones for ideas, if not just outright lampooning them. It just shows how the old specials still resonate today, even after almost five decades.

metaphizzle says:
December 1, 2010 at 4:33 pm

“CGI just doesn’t have the charm and human quality of stop motion and hand painted cel animation.”

CGI is a tool, just as valid as traditional animation or stop-motion, that can be used poorly or well. For example, witness our genial host's own thoughts on Pixar's WALL-E.

CGI simply happens to be cheaper than traditional animation, so it can be expected that the the medium will attract more than its fair share of hacks who are more interested in making a buck than in making good animation.

swschrad says:
December 1, 2010 at 4:35 pm

@John M Hanna: bravo, sir. are we to laugh about “Casablanca” because it was black and white, and war propaganda? “Fantasia” because it's a mickey-mouse outfit?

there is a cinematographic segment that thinks stop-action production is the truest art in movie making.

the story was a bit choppy in “Rudolph,” and for the first minute or two the animation was off-putting, but if you stuck with it, it was a good show.

yeah, Rankin-Bass was a meat market, but so was UPI, and their characters have endured and been revived a ton of times, even though the art was all done with rulers. Picasso would have been sunk without his T-square, too.
bgbear says:
December 1, 2010 at 4:44 pm

besides the animated stuff, check out some of the 60s-70s specials (besides Star wars) on YouTube.

I like the Andy Williams and Johnny Cash Christmas specials. One Andy Williams features his family including his killer wife.

DryOwlTacos says:
December 1, 2010 at 4:46 pm

Someone please verify my recollection that one or more years of the Norelco Santa commercial, there were merry voices singing “Floating heads, floating heads...” to the tune of “Jingle Bells.”

bgbear says:
December 1, 2010 at 5:13 pm

@DryOwlTacos; maybe you are referring the first run of the Rudolph special with the later deleted scene where Rudolph is surrounded by various and sundry severed heads. Some of the heads may have been floating.

_Hermey: The heads. You're looking at the heads. Sometimes he goes too far. He's the first one to admit it._

_Rudolph: They used to laugh and call me names._

Bob Lipton says:
December 1, 2010 at 5:39 pm

John Hanna, I simply disagree. Yes, I'm a traditionalist, and I know that traditions change, but to me there is a huge difference between, say, the Peanuts specials, with their great music, or the original Grinch, and the Rankin-Bass stuff. There's something about the R-B stuff that strikes me as wrong. Chuck Jones didn't have the budgets — comparatively — when doing Grinch that he had in the 1940s, so he simplified and did great work within that context. R-B ornamented and then failed on execution. Me, I'd rather have something simple done well than something complicated done poorly.

Yes, the age when you come into this is important, but to me the difference is this: there's stuff you look at as a child and are enchanted. When you grow up, you see it's poorly done but love it for the pleasure you had way back when. Then there's stuff you look at as a child and are enchanted and when you grow up, you can see the craftsmanship.

Which is why, from Black Thursday through December 25th, I only wear a Grinch tie.

Bob

Bob Lipton says:
December 1, 2010 at 5:46 pm

And let me echo Metaphizzle about CGI: I wouldn't trade all the skeletons in THE MUMMY RETURNS for the seven that Harryhausen used in JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS. The former were just c**p while Harryhausen's fellows were real, with vicious senses of humor. Yet the dinosaurs in JURASSIC PARK are real.
Bob

**swschrad** says:
December 1, 2010 at 6:03 pm

@DryOwlTacos:

*floating heads, floating heads, floating all the way
Norelco is the shaver gift to give on Christmas day.*

is what you’re looking for. no wonder we forget our keys, or pants,
or home location as we get older, with all that krep stuck in our
heads from when we were kids.

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**swschrad** says:
December 1, 2010 at 6:07 pm

the ditty opened the first set of the santa/shaver commercials, as
santa skated across the snowy hills in his tripleheader top.

which implied to me the jolly old gent had a pretty raw bottom
before long, I gotta tell ya.

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**juanito - John Davey** says:
December 1, 2010 at 6:13 pm

*bgbear says:*
*December 1, 2010 at 3:13 pm*

*tee hee @ all toy suggestions*

*There was a story about the girl who does the Dora the Explorer
voice getting canned because her voiced changed. I see a talking
Dora doll that sounds like she going through three packs of
smokes and a fifth of scotch each day.*

You sure that wasn’t the Charlie Rangel doll?

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**bgbear** says:
December 1, 2010 at 6:20 pm

juanito should be censored for that comment.

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**wawona** says:
December 1, 2010 at 6:31 pm

Re Rankin/Bass specials: NONE of the other Rankin/Bass things had
a bit of charm for me, kid or adult, other than Rudolph (a little),
even if they were stop-motion.

If you want a comparison point about Rankin/Bass — that isn’t
Rudolph — see the awful “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” with a
stop-motion Fred Astaire (!) and tell me you can watch the entire
song of “If You Sit On My Lap Today” without squirming.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Claus_Is_Comin%27_to_Town_(TV_special)

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**juanito - John Davey** says:
December 1, 2010 at 6:33 pm
bgbear says:  
December 1, 2010 at 6:20 pm  

juanito should be censored for that comment.

But..... I'm broke, I had to fire my lawyers... Can we reschedule this?

juanito - John Davey says:  
December 1, 2010 at 6:38 pm  

bgbear, here you go: Time Machine: Charlie Rangel Testifies before Congress

swschrad says:  
December 1, 2010 at 6:48 pm  

@bgbear, juanito: all supporters of juanito are asked to call the capitol switchboard.

why in 'ell, Rangel himself apparently had no clue. I guess he would like to have himself paged.

“fdsking idiot from New York, pick up the pink insult phone please. fdsking idiot from New York, grab the pink phone and play princess. click”

Chas C-Q says:  
December 1, 2010 at 10:09 pm  

Forgive me. Raging Rudolph

ssmart says:  
December 1, 2010 at 10:30 pm  

“She went off to school to learn about Indians”

So, Who's her fav? Lou Boudreau or Bob Feller?

Ross says:  
December 2, 2010 at 3:09 am  

Ironically, Jones, et al. _didn’t_ have real budgets back in the WB days, thanks to the terminally cheap, comedically tin-eared Leon Schlesinger(they called the animation shack “Termite Terrace” w/good reason), but, lucky for us, there was no cheaper alternative to hand-painting cels. It's one reason why any good WB 'toon impresses me even more than my favorite MGM 'toons(e.g., Tex Avery's “Magical Maestro” or “Swing Shift Cinderella”), which _did_ have decent budgets/support.

Maharincess:  
“Swanning about” did at one time mean foppish airs, but see Python's “The Men of the Second Armoured Division…Close-order Swanning About” for the more modern implication.

“How are these kids going to make it in the real world when their future employers criticize their work?” Unless they get lucky enough to get an employer that values plain
English & accountability over bizspeak, they won't have to worry about it (at least, not directly); my experience of offices over the last 25 yrs is that any straightforward description of error/polite criticism will land the critic/reporter in deep kimchi for being “attacking” (note the ungrammatical terms already), “insensitive” or “unconstructive”. Unless preceeded by &/or suffused with a load of uncutuous servility & self-abasement that would make Uriah Heep vomit, any perfectly neutral statement of fact will make the person trying to improve something the villain of the piece. It started (even before the self-esteem-uber-alles approach became de rigeur in the schools) once these business morons started copying the military's Alice in Wonderland approach to language & procedure, & has steadily devolved from there.

Gene Dillenburg says:
December 2, 2010 at 8:30 am

The cowboy who rides an ostrich was my introduction to surrealism.

shesnailie says:
December 2, 2010 at 8:52 am

_@_v – new on the island of misfit toys – rubiks tessaract

Patrick McClure says:
December 2, 2010 at 9:11 am

One recent Christmas Special, no longer broadcast, which I loved was “A Wish for Wings That Worked” (IIRC that was the title) w/ Berke Brethed’s Blom County character. I can still get a laugh out of my wife by saying plaintively “an albatross!”. I wonder why no one plays it now?

Chas C-Q says:
December 2, 2010 at 10:49 am


The new DVD for 2010 includes a bonus “Holiday” CD. I found it on Amazon.

FWIW, Berkeley Breathed, being always the curmudgeonly artist, reportedly HATED the TV version. That may help explain its absence from broadcast television.

PAX showed it a couple of years ago, IIRC. HDnet Movies Direct TV has shown it this year.

Patrick McClure says:
December 2, 2010 at 11:37 am

Thanks Chas. No HD TV at home, so I’ll go to Amazon.

MJBirch says:
December 2, 2010 at 11:39 am

Ross — you mentioned Leon Schlesinger — according to one of
Chuck Jones's two memoirs (name escapes me for first one, second book was Duckamuck) — Schlesinger's voice was the model for Daffy Duck. When the artists previewed Daffy Duck (plus voice) Schlesinger raved about the new character. “And I love the voithhh! Where did you get it???”

Tin-eared indeed…
In response to many pleas: I can’t find the solution to the Out of Context mystery. It’s around here somewhere. This is a huge admission of failure on the part of my vaunted filing system. It tasks me, and I shall have it. But not today.

Cold. The sort of day where you see people gathered around a witch’s teat, warming their hands. It wasn’t the temperature itself; that was a mild 16. But the wind was ginzu-quality. A story in the paper today said people are already tired of winter – hmm. Seems a bit early. Usually the despair is reserved for February, where the annual delusion about March and spring sets in. But that will come soon enough. There’s a holiday party at a neighbor’s this weekend, and I can’t believe it’s been a year; likewise the Fun Run at my daughter’s school. Seemed like yesterday. The years gallop on at a heedless pace, and we want to pull up the reins and slow to a canter.

But Friday can’t come fast enough!

Good day: productive. Did many things. Wrote a lot. Not much of consequence, but I’m paid to turn it out by the yard, so I earned my bread. Mentioned the “Psych” show on the work blog – tonight it’s the Twin Peaks episode, called – hyuk, hyuk – Dual Spires. A peak is not a spire, exactly; I would have gone with Two Points, but I understand it’s also a half-comedy show, so the nudge-nudge factor has to be high. I’ll watch it just because I
miss TP, or at least miss the part until they solved the mystery. After that there was a cross-dressing FBI agent and Windom Earle dressed as a giant chess piece, right? The ending was cool enough, but once the mystery was solved it was difficult to care about any of it. They should have dumped all the characters except for Coop, Truman, and Hawk, and started again with something equally spooky. From what I read, the show will contain ominous ceiling fans – that made me smile, but okay, it’s going to be a joke, isn’t it. The ceiling fans were ominous. That damned traffic light gave you the chills.

It would be that or Netflix tonight. I have a new goal in life: to watch the first ten minutes of every movie on Netflix. I love credit sequences. It’s an art all its own. For some reason last night I called up Star Trek: That Borg One, which has some unforgivable aspects, most of them having to do with Zephram Cochrane. Yeah, make him a hippy. That’s great. An angry drunk damaged hippy biker in his sixties, that’s how we see him. And I still don’t like the Enterprise-E. It’s impossible to get from the Neutral Zone to Sector 0.0.1 in time to join a battle. C’mon. But who cares. Lots of stuff blows up real nice, so there’s that, but after the opening sequence I went to bed. Anyway: the credits are typical Star Trek credits: just the names, ma’am.

It’s a nice piece of soundtrack music. Starts out with the expected theme, then rolls out into something broad and grand – and elegiac. Sad, almost, as if this is the end.

I always thought this was simply beautiful as well. At :53, it gives you a little theme that could have come from the original series.
How did I get sidetracked? Reminds me I’d vowed to watch all of DS9 from season 3 on to the end. Add that to the list of things to do after A) I watch all of Battlestar Galactica, and B) write a column. B comes first, though. Be back in a bit.

—

LATER

Okay, that's done. Sort of. Will require the usual gut & refill tomorrow. Blurt it out the night before, trim and perfect in the cold light of day. A few more things here, before I settle in to watch “Psych” – I do want to go to sleep before 1:30 this time, because it makes for slobby morns and astonishingly ornate dreams during the requisite nap. Deep nap dreams are something else; baroque and immediate. Considering that I start the nap as the light of day fades and wake in darkness, it's double disconcerting. You know where you are when wake from a night's sleep, but a deep nap taken on the cusp of nightfall can take it all away.

So I get back to this, and think, oh: great. A YouTube post! People love those. Actually, no; most of us realize that embedded videos are a bit of an indulgence. The poster can add critical commentary, but somehow that makes the entire affair less compelling. At least that’s been my experience. If someone’s going too far down a rabbit hole, and it’s 10 clips of a band about which I have no strong feelings, well, tldw.* Movie credits are different, though, because A) I say so, and B) they’re an art form well-adapted to the YouTube distribution medium. Because they're short. Thanks to YouTube, and desperate lazy bloggers, you can revisit these little time capsules. I think I posted this before, years ago, but for some reason it came to mind tonight. Burt Bacharach, the Hollies, and a quite inventive series of key changes: and harpsichord!

* http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8403
Okay, that's enough. Also today: at the office I went down to the second floor, where Studio A is, where we shot Newsbreak. That seems like a strange hallucination now. Sections of the second floor have been mothballed, and items left in place when the area was decommissioned have remained as such, apparently forever. Sometimes on the second floor I feel like Charlton Heston in a car dealership in “Omega Man.”

Waiting for information or announcements that will never come:
A chair in the lounge which used to have a little cafe; a cheerful guy named Jim made the coffee. I would drop down for an Americano, sit by the window, and write the first batch of the Joe Ohio stories. They pulled the cafe a few years ago. There are vending machines now. It's mostly empty. The chairs, I believe, are all refugees from the old newsroom, now scattered around the building, waiting for customers.
Oh: and lest you think I was just blowing smoke when I said I was combing through digital copies of Mad Magazine looking for a particular panel that stuck in my mind:
So I didn't imagine it. Whew.

The end of the Small-Town North Dakota Google page: here. All sorts of sites ending this month. Enjoy, and have a grand day!

*tl;dw = too long, didn’t watch

60 RESPONSES TO why not work? work is hard

metaphizzle says:
December 2, 2010 at 4:59 pm

“It took me some time to get into STNG, when Riker grew a beard it got better.”

In the same way that “jumping the shark” has caught on as the vernacular for the moment a show takes a terminal dive in quality, there’s portions of the internet where “growing the beard” refers to the moment where a mediocre show suddenly gets a heck of a lot better. Yes, it was named in reference to Riker’s beard.

xrayguy says:
December 2, 2010 at 5:14 pm

Stretch Cunningham-gay.
I remember Cromwell in “6 Feet Under” making everyone eat vegetarian. Isn’t part of acting NOT behaving like yourself, ACTING like someone else, NOT pushing your own beliefs and opinions onto the character- and don’t give me that “maybe the character is a vegetarian” crap either.
shesnailie says:
December 2, 2010 at 5:24 pm

_@_v – electric show shovels aren't worth scat. have one but it sits in
the cellar for all the good it doesn't do. worthless on anything but a
smooth substrate and even then leaves a thin layer to melt and
refreeze – guaranteeing a jagged substrate for the next snowfall.

RexV says:
December 2, 2010 at 5:47 pm

I know it's blasphemos but Peter Sellers...meh! And James
Cromwell has been revisiting his role in LA Confidential for the past
decade. When you see him on screen you know you're getting the
corrupt bigwig. I imagine his role on Six Feet Under was pretty true
to life.

bgbear says:
December 2, 2010 at 6:31 pm

IIRC, James Cromwell is the only actor to go through the entire
"revenge of the nerds" series (maybe Bobby Carradine too).

wawona says:
December 2, 2010 at 7:01 pm

...re "After the Fox": Add one more who remembers it. I saw it from
the back seat of my parents' Dodge Dart Station Wagon at the Drive-
In movie when it came out. (The only thing I REALLY remember
about it is that theme song (I haven't even played the clip and I can
sing it even now!). I always mix it up with "What's New, Pussycat"
for the catchy theme song, the drive-in, the cute animal in the
title..and being about 7 years old when it came out...)

Mike says:
December 2, 2010 at 10:34 pm

Wow. Six other humans that know of, and like, “After The Fox”. I
love this place!

gottacook says:
December 3, 2010 at 3:06 am

There's a reason the music at 0:53 of Voyager is reminiscent of the
original series music; this is a bit involved, so bear with me.

The melody has an emphasized flat sixth (a long note value on a
downbeat) approached from and returning to the fifth just below it,
such as G-(A-flat)-G; then the sequence is repeated. I always
presumed that Jerry Goldsmith took this element of the Voyager
theme from his own “Ilia's theme” in the first Star Trek movie 20
years earlier, which has the same idea but in 3/4 time. In turn I
think he based this on a theme of George Duning's from the original
series, also used to highlight an important female character – Dr.
Miranda Jones (Diana Muldaur) – throughout “Is There in Truth No
Beauty?” from season 3. (The interval changes from minor 2nd to
major 2nd at the end – that is, it isn't flatted anymore – when she is
“one with Kollos,” the Medusan ambassador, and about to debark.)
So perhaps the use of this motif in the Voyager theme is likewise
meant to highlight an important woman: not a guest star in this
case, but rather the captain.
fizzbin says:
December 3, 2010 at 12:13 pm

@juanito- John Davey

Sir, I will see your Star Fleet Technical Manual and raise you:

Star Trek Concordance (first printing)
TOS Enterprise blueprints
U.S.S. Excelsior blueprints
Regula 1 blueprints
Star Fleet Medical Reference Manual (once a Medic, always a Medic)
U.S.S. Enterprise Officers Manual (know thine enemy, heh)
Federation Reference Series 1, 2 and 3
Starship Design Manual
Romulan Ship Recognition Manual

And a bunch of other stuff I'm too lazy to list. I'm not a big fan of the ST universe 😒

AND, I still don't understand why some people get their knickers in a twist over different versions of the Enterprise. Maybe I'm just a dupa 😒

Fred says:
December 10, 2010 at 10:12 pm

Fortunately “After the Fox” is available for instant play on Netflix so I'll be watching it soon...
Oh. Gosh. Brrr. My infuriation – and there's a word I'm surprised the spellcheck accepted – with the modern world reached a late-in-the-year apogee tonight when I had to take out the recycling. The temp is 100 below Sane. It's the stuff of a cactus' nightmare. We had a month's worth of stuff, because we missed a pickup during the cruise, so it looks like we had a wild weekend where we did nothing but buy extra copies of the newspaper and shotgun diet Cokes. Also, wine; Thanksgiving, and all that. In the garage I spied two bags of fargin' phone books – we'd been hit with a double order, and now I had to drag them out for the paper-knackers, but since they were in plastic bags, I had to dig an extra brown paper bag out of the brown paper bag holding the overflow brown paper bags, because the recycling guys won't take anything loose. Of course I wasn't wearing a coat, because I am a Man, so I'm standing out there freezing, piling up useless phone books I never used, never looked at, never wanted.

But if I'd thrown back my head and shouted STOP GIVING ME PHONE BOOKS into the frigid crystalline dark, anyone who heard my cry would have understood immediately.

I'm sure I was supposed to rip off the covers and recycle them separately.

Sorry about that.

Busy day. Type, type, type. Hit the sheets for a nap, was interrupted twice by
the phone; in both instances I dropped back into REM sleep for more frantic pell-mell surrealism. Got up, fetched child from cello class, hacked up some ground meat for tacos, did a radio show. If you listened, hope you heard Jasper barking outside. I'd let him out to relieve himself. It's so cold he doesn't even want to go out, which is rare for him. This morning when I came downstairs to get coffee I found a neat compact turd on the living room floor. He's old, so this happens. But when I picked it up it was like picking up a cold ingot. He'd held that one so long it compacted to the density of a neutron star, and I wondered if I tossed it in the toilet and flushed whether the entire bathroom, perhaps the house, would follow it in, folding in on itself like the house in “Poltergeist.” I mean, you could chip the teeth off a cross-cut saw on that bowel-bolus.

Dogs hate to foul their dens. That's how cold it is.

**Daughter** showed me a picture today, with an explanation: it's just a ref. The fact that she showed it to me indicated she was proud of it; the fact she said “it’s just a ref” – meaning, she used someone else’s work as a reference – gladdened my heart, because she wasn’t trying to pass off someone else’s pose as her own idea. But, well, dang:

Freehand, looking at another picture, no tracing. I asked if I could post this, and she said yes, but . . . she went back to her room, and came back with another picture, and said I would have to post this if I did the ref. This one she did on her own without looking at anyone else's stuff.
Now, the bad news: she probably needs glasses. Don’t necessarily think it’s bad news; I got glasses in 4th grade, and it wasn’t traumatic. Probably liked them: now I look smart and older! They made me look dorky and more beat-up-able, but that was then. Now glasses are chic. “They’ll make me look like a nerd and a geek,” she said.

What can you say? I wanted to say “Child, you’re the one who installed an open-source PC emulator on your machine so you could run an open-source drawing program on your Mac without booting into Windows, so you could draw anime characters. YOU ARE A GEEK. But not a nerd. She can get contacts as soon as possible, and yes they’re a pain, but when I had them they were actual glass; it was like wearing ceramic saucers over your eyeball, and every time I put them in it felt grotesquely unnatural. I think she’ll look fine. Wife was bummed: “She’ll never be a fighter pilot.” Possibly not. But she might be running drones from a remote location wearing a 3D Panoramic helmet, without the danger of combat. Look on the bright side, hon.

**Hey, Friday!** Oh, heck, let’s just get started with weekly Diners now, shall we? They’ll be shorter – this one is four minutes shy of half an hour, but the ones in the future will be 15-20 minutes, and will have longer plots that span a month or two, and some other innovations I’ve planned. It’s here -
Or [here](http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8412), if the player isn’t showing up. (I always have to hit reload on preview to make the flash stuff show up, FWIW.) Now. The title of this episode is “604,” and contains some extremely obscure musical hints about what’s happening. If you don’t get what’s going on, all will be clear next week; if you do recognize it, there will be a nice little a-ha moment. If not, don’t worry; it’s supposed to end in confusion. I would apologize for these things except that I just make it up as I go along. Never know what I’m going to do when I start – in fact, the entire plot came about when I was casting around for a word, and came up with a well-known spicy table condiment.

Also: the [Gallery of Regrettable Food’s Ad section starts today](http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8412), with eight pages. It will go on forever, more or less.

Have a fine, fine weekend. I’ll be sampling Maker’s Mark’s new 46 Friday night, and will report back. I’m so anxious for this weekend I may actually preorder the pizza online before I go to bed.

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**81 RESPONSES TO incident at wildfire**

**Browniejr** says:

December 3, 2010 at 3:46 pm


I got glasses when I was around 10, got rid of them a few years ago thanks to LASIK… Wouldn’t recommend it for a kid until their eyes were fully developed, but for adults it is HIGHLY recommended.

**Wilber the Puppy** says:

December 3, 2010 at 3:58 pm

It is just me or should the American Meat Institute ad be titled something like “The victorious hotdog air force is cheered by the other luncheon meats upon their return to the home country…”

**Philip Scott Thomas** says:

December 3, 2010 at 4:00 pm

@swschrad

Precisely. Some of that ad copy is so horrifically bad that I can only imagine it being created by some advertising company’s junior office staff, especially as pictured in *Mad Men*.

**Jennifer** says:

December 3, 2010 at 4:06 pm

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Love her drawings, the second one more so. It's got such a relaxed, confident hand to it. Very nice.

The geek shall inherit the earth. Without question.

Aleta says:
December 3, 2010 at 4:20 pm

Ah, but she still has the possibility of being a test pilot, and after test pilot school she can come be a space plane pilot for my company. If she's interested. I'd love to have her on my payroll.

fizzbin says:
December 3, 2010 at 4:36 pm

Al, our pal ("our" because of all the people in my head)….you have no idea how happy it makes me to read that your panties are in a bunch because Ms.(G)nat dressed as an American Warrior 😃 I hope you will vomit another post on how it scares you, damages your precious self-esteem, oh mommy Pelosi protect me, whine-sniffle-blah-blah-blah. You amuse this cranky old man.

Maybe I should take the blue pill?

Heather says:
December 3, 2010 at 4:52 pm

http://www.dontrashthephonebook.org/

This is a link to a page that helps you opt-out of all phone books.

Wagner von Drupen-Sachs says:
December 3, 2010 at 4:54 pm

“Sack o’ sauce in a can o’ meat” might be an apt, if figurative, description of the Snail, regarded as food…

swschrad says:
December 3, 2010 at 4:56 pm

@Wagner von: snail. regarded as food. a-ha-ha-HA-HA-ha ha ha ha

oh, my side hurts

put that on wikiLeaks attributed to Sarkozy as well.

GardenStater says:
December 3, 2010 at 5:28 pm

@Wagner: Don’t start saying that kind of stuff around shesnailie. She's sensitive about it....

And Al: Are you troubled by the Boy Scouts, as well? They hold flags, and they carry knives and hatchets, and they even shoot real guns!

Chilling, isn't it?

Actually what would be more chilling would be if we eliminated our military and sat around singing kumbaya, hoping that the world would “respect” us.
Patrick says:
December 3, 2010 at 5:31 pm

Awesome pictures by the (G)nat. I would read whatever comic she’d put up, or even watch an anime-style cartoon, if she did one.

@Normie: I see sort of a combination of a cat and a fox.

I think I know the inspiration. Is it just me, or does the second picture remind anyone here of Peg from Disney’s “Lady and the Tramp”?

Richard C. Moeur says:
December 3, 2010 at 8:41 pm

JamesS & bgbear, to this day for some reason I still think that there might be a moment that there will be a firm knock on the door, and a squared-away courier stating “There’s a fire, sir.”

Xplora says:
December 3, 2010 at 9:37 pm

Wow. Great Sketches!
They look just like Disney pre-production sketches.
Looks like the work of a future animator,
and artist! …Well Done

hpoulter says:
December 4, 2010 at 6:25 am

Diner download is broken. Another commenter mentioned it as well.

shesnailie says:
December 4, 2010 at 7:08 am

_@_v – the only ‘meat’ on us snails is the foot – covered in slime and whose interior is never more than a few millimeters from dirt – that, because our digestive system is up in the shell, is continuously being shat upon. yeah, that’s good eatin’ folks.

Janeen says:
December 4, 2010 at 7:30 am

Ahh what a great read on my Saturday morning! It’s a cold morning in Florida, too.
Agreed, her sketches are Disney worthy! And cool on the glasses!
Had them since 5 years old. But, I say no on the contacts until she’s a bit older. I’m no doctor, but a mom of 3, one who wears contacts now at 17 and one who insisted on glasses instead at 16.
4th grade, fingers in the eyes….I see nothing but cases of pink eye in your future!

On another note, I was a lucky one who got to sit with James and his beautiful wife our first night on cruise. At risk of sounding Kathy Bates-ish, “I’m your biggest fan!” Will catch you for a tequila tasting on the next cruise!
fizzbin says:
December 4, 2010 at 11:44 am

Good Lord, shesnailie!!! I've just gotten used to raw squid and you have to get all detailie about yersef....Oooooo, I don't feel well 😐

shesnailie says:
December 4, 2010 at 12:43 pm

_@_v – learn to eat cow. they're made of meat, don'tcha know...

Mark E. Hurling says:
December 4, 2010 at 3:32 pm

I've said it before and I'll say it again. If God didn't intend for us to eat animals, He wouldn't have made them out of meat.

swschrnad says:
December 4, 2010 at 9:39 pm

TASTY meat, too. we're about due for another half of a half of beef. my work buddy who has hunting buddies with a locker plant will probably call "bring your coolers and checkbook" day for January or February again.

fine grass-fed beef, full of omega-3s and lively on the palate.

the 21 pound turkey from Thanksgiving is just about totally gone, one more meal of hot dish left. if Son #3 doesn't get to it first.

snails, ffft. the only flavor from that is probably the flukes, and the garlic butter. I can pour garlic butter on French bread like Totino's does, two blocks down, if I want foreign dining.

those in the greater USA probably doesn't realize there was a real neighborhood restaurant and homemade recipes behind the frozen boxes marked Totino's. when Pillsbury bought rights and the name, 40 years or so ago, the family insisted they be allowed to operate one restaurant to keep a business in the family. It moved from Fridley to north Minneapolis, and got redeveloped out of there three years ago. they came up to my neck 'o' the woods in North Burbs, and it's still good stuff with top service.

which could bring up another Minnesota tale of Jeno Palucci, of Chun King/Jeno's/Authentico-Michelina's-Yu Sing, but that's another dead boring night's typing.

shesnailie says:
December 5, 2010 at 1:14 am

_@_v – marinating one of god's delicious creatures as we speak...

Abby says:
December 5, 2010 at 2:42 pm

I just finished reading "Riding Rockets" by Mike Mullane, and he says that fighter pilots wear glasses all the time behind their masks. There's some boundary out there that defines fighter-pilot-ability, I suppose, because Mullane himself sat in the backseat instead of the frontseat of the cockpit because of his vision, but just needing glasses isn't it.
So you can tell your wife to look up — Gnat still may become a fighter pilot.

**fantabulous** says:
December 5, 2010 at 7:24 pm

Those look like the Chuck Jones cat drawings in “Chuck Amok.”

**Charlie Young** says:
December 6, 2010 at 12:42 pm

Late to the party…Natalie has probably jailbroken mom’s iPhone already, too.

And as far as fighting a war remotely, I just can't fathom the reason to do this. I have the opinion if you aren't willing to get your hands dirty fighting a war, you have no reason being there. You have to go toe-to-toe with the enemy. If you're sitting in some control center killing people, you've reduced human life to nothing more than shooting bits on a video screen. Makes you wonder why kids find it so easy to go into the streets with a 9mm and start popping caps into someone.

**Charlie Young** says:
December 6, 2010 at 12:44 pm

Admittedly, the whole youth violence thing is a lot deeper than video games. The socio-economic issues involved are extremely complicated.

**fizzbin** says:
December 6, 2010 at 1:36 pm

Sorry, Charlie…take it from one who has been there, done that, remote killing is preferred. If you are close enough to see the enemy, the enemy is close enough to see you. Much horror, pain and sorrow ensue. We were never more happy when artillery and/or air-strikes took out the enemy so we would not have to go “toe-to-toe”.

War is not Glory…it is pure Hell.

**Charlie Young** says:
December 6, 2010 at 4:24 pm

Not thinking it is glorious, just if it gets too easy to fight without firsthand horror, war becomes commonplace. The best way to avoid war is to realize how truly terrible it is. Even in an air strike or on the artillery line, you are essentially there. Remote drones can be run from hundreds to thousands of miles away. Pretty much takes you out of the action. Drop a few thousand pounds of ordnance then go have a coffee break…that's not war, that's a video game.

**fizzbin** says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:42 pm

War IS commonplace. As I write this there are places on Earth were people are killing and dieing. These wars do not grab headlines but are lethal, none the less. I can assure you the participants are seeking an easier, safer way to kill their enemies. A war is won when the
enemy loses the will to fight, is overwhelmed by superior might, or is dead. Obviously, to be victorious, you must maximize enemy deaths while minimizing your own. The more remote the kill, the fewer casualties for your side. Unless we evolve, our fate is to kill each other. So far, even though we posses world-killing nuclear and biological weapons, we have made the choice to use conventional explosives and thermobaric bombs (jihadies would love to use a nuke or two). Maybe there is hope for us.

swschrad says:
December 7, 2010 at 2:15 pm

if national leaders had to get on the front line and drop their sabers to start the charge, we’d have fewer wars.
we’d also have fewer nutcase “leaders.”
just sayin’...

fizzbin says:
December 7, 2010 at 2:35 pm

@swschard .....rodger that!!! but i’m not holding my breath 🙄

GardenStater says:
December 7, 2010 at 5:10 pm

Considering what the calendar says today, let us all pause to remember the men who died in Hawaii, and the brave souls who fought back.

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140 OR SO
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CLICK – AND SAVE!

A BOOK I RECOMMEND

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8420
My daughter has a dread, common perhaps to many children, of Daddy Causing a Scene. I don't know where her horror comes from, because I never raise my voice or use bad words or browbeat waiters or clerks. But when the pizza arrives and it is not to my exact specifications, she begs me not to call them up and complain. IT'S OKAY, DAD. Well, Friday we had snow in excelsis deo, and when the pizza arrived it was 40 minutes out of the oven, cold as the grave, and generally a miserable product. Since I'd paid good money for this, I was disinclined to let it go.

DAD, IT'S OKAY. You don't have to call.

But I called anyway. Why? Because if you call and issue a genial but firm complaint, and you don't ask for them to remake it right now – something they really don't want to do when they're running 40 minutes late – then you'll probably get your next order free.

The manager came on the line. “I know it’s snowy and it takes a while to get around, but my pizza arrived stone cold.”

NO IT'S NOT COLD, said my helpful child.

I shot her a look the likes of which has not seen before. Ever. Then I
continued: “my daughter’s protestations to the contrary, it was cold. It came out of the oven at 6:03, according to the online tracker, and got here at 6:47. It's really not very good.”

She asked if I wanted it remade, and I said no. Wait for it . . . “Okay, well, I'll put in a note here that we owe you two free pizzas next time you order.”

Bingo! Ta da. Mission accomplished. I thanked her and hung up, then asked my child what the DEVIL she thought she was doing, shouting out like that. Made me look like a liar.

“I don’t know what came over me,” she said. “You’ve never looked at me like that before. I thought I was going to get a spanking.”

“That,” I said, “was a level six death-stare.”

“What do I have to do to get a level ten?”

“I hope you’ll never know. And it goes to eleven.”

I think we can all agree I was reasonable here. I’m a regular customer. I tip the deliveryman well. I let little imperfections slide. But when you order a hot pizza with extra sauce and you get a cold pizza with no sauce, well, a fella just has to stand up for what’s right.

Which brings us to Sunday at Target, and here you may part company with me. I pushed my huge swollen cart to the belt, and offloaded the goods according to genre. If all the frozen foods are packed together, they stay cold on the way home. If you sort all the dry foods together, all the “health and beauty” items together, you have a good chance of getting everything in bags you can transport around the house to their desired locations. Doesn’t always work out that way, but you can hope.

Prior to Target I’d gone to Office Depot to get some ink. Correction: to get the wrong ink. Might as well have intended to get the wrong damned ink cartridge, because then it would have been a successful trip. I forgot if I was on an Epson or an HP this week, and even though I thought I saw the right model, it turns out I got the wrong ink. So it’s back for more of that holiday merriment that only Office Depot can provide – distant tinny carols playing above while people shuffle through rows stocked with staplers and fake office plants and paper. Nay, specialty paper. There were signs advertising deals, of course, but now the signs had elves on them. Post-modern dancing edgy elves. Some days I love Office Depot, because it suggests that you may actually attain some sort of order in your drawers. So to speak. You may not be able to find serenity in any area of your life, but your file folders will be consistent and color-coded. Today, though, it was just depressing. I walked outside and the grey cold day slapped me in the face just to remind me who’s in charge. Off to Target.

I assembled the meals, did some Christmas shopping, bought some wrapping paper on the off chance we had exhausted the 296 rolls in the closet, then went to the check-out line. A woman and child came up behind me; she had
one item. I bade her to go ahead. She said that was okay, she'd gone to get one item and left some stuff with the cashier. Point being, she'd abdicated her place in line. But obviously there wasn't much, and in a sense she was just retaking a place in line she'd had before I got there. O Generous Me! She apologized for accepting my offer, checked out, and everyone was full of the holiday spirit.

The clerk started beeping my goods, and I noted right away she was just tossing stuff in the bag. She was also talking with a friend who'd shown up, and they were chatting away in fine style about something or other. When she gave me my first bag I looked into its disordered depths, and sighed: no. So I repacked it. If she saw she didn't care. The second bag needed repacking, especially since a huge bladder of orange juice was on top of some small easily-crushed items. Framing a bag is a skill, a challenge; it's like Tetris, except all the pieces are differently shaped. There's satisfaction in framing a bag properly, and I say that as someone who used to bag groceries for his salt.

I repacked four bags. When I was done I realized that she'd finished, and I hadn't signed the card-reader, and the person behind me was glaring at me: GET ON WITH IT. So in a matter of minutes I'd gone from Mr. Generous, waving people ahead in line, to Mr. Obstacle. I apologized deeply – almost said “if you'd seen me wave someone ahead a few minutes ago you would know I'm a good person!” but they all say that; all the people who just don't realize there are other people in the world think they're good people – and moved along. Ran right into a manager. Now. Do I say something?

Damn right I do. If the clerk had looked new or harried or just plain not cut out for the job, or new at this, let it slide, but when someone stands there babbling away to a pal throwing everything into the bag so the bottle of spaghetti sauce is crushing the muffins, so to speak, sorry.

I jerked a thumb back to the checkout lane. “18 needs to watch the video on framing again,” I said. The manager looked at my bags. “I repacked them,” I said. “The wrong stuff was on top of small stuff.”

“Thank you,” said the manager.

Now. Here's where I'm sure some of you will think I was a total jerk. What's the big deal? I'll tell you what: you struggle in the house with the groceries, and the bag rips because a box of cereal was laid in at an angle and the corner pierced the paper. Or something is crushed. Disaster! If you're wondering whether I praise a clerk for excellent framing: you bet. That's how I know about the video. One clerk said she liked making things fit in the bag, and I asked if they taught them. She said they just watch a video. Yes, I am making too much of this for the sake of extending a Bleat, but there's a deeper issue: if you've done a particular service job, you're sympathetic to anyone who's having a hard time – say, a waitress dealing with a dozen tables or a slow kitchen – and you're utterly unsympathetic to someone who just doesn't give a fig. Me, I was taught by a pro. A guy with a green apron. A grocer. There's a tradition here.
I'm kidding. Somewhat. Well, not a lot. Just a bit. But not really.

–

Attended a neighborhood Christmas party. Impossible that it's been a year since the last. I was JUST THERE the other day in the same kitchen, thinking, you will always find me in the kitchen at parties, eh? Did I think that last year? Of course. Did I say that in a blog post? Probably. Did I embed the video? No doubt. Difference this year: I can access the song via the Apple TV and listen to it while I write this post.

Oh, heck. Hey! There's a new version! Yes! It's an IKEA advert; this is the longer version.

The Original:

Monday Matchbook. Lint returns today! Watch the Twitter feed for updates. And if “watching a Twitter feed” just isn't in your list of things to do, I understand. Have a grand day.
81 RESPONSES TO frame or not frame. there is no try

bgbear says:
December 6, 2010 at 1:37 pm

A coyote played chicken in front of me today on the way to work, that is, I was on my way to work, he might of been as well. It looked like all coyotes, a scrawny little mutt.

Jasper is better looking.

Pieter DeVries says:
December 6, 2010 at 1:54 pm

Follow up to troll comment. Been coming to this sight ever since Hugh Hewitt went on the air. Watched Gnat grow up. She's learning from her father every day. Great dad, truly, but as she gets older her dad's idiosyncracies go from quaint and charming to life lessons. Still think Gnat was right and dad was wrong. Warm pizza was O.K. versus creating “the stink” and scoring free pizza, which was the goal of the call in the first place. I guess James reminds me of my wife so, since I can't criticize her, I'm transferring to Gnat's dad. Freud would be proud.

Eliza Jane says:
December 6, 2010 at 1:56 pm

James, do you realize that the respect that Gnat has for you just took a hit that she will probably never forget? She knows that you complained only to get a free pizza. She knows that the driver had to risk his life getting your stoopid pizza to you and will now be reamed by management, and your free pizza will probably be taken out of his paycheck. You lost a lot of points in your daughter's eyes. She is not going to forget.

hpoulter says:
December 6, 2010 at 2:19 pm

@fizzbin – I don't think it's you. Reminds me of the old joke about deterrence – no-one attacks the eskimos (pardon me, Inuits) becuase they have had ICBMs for years.

JerseyAmy says:
December 6, 2010 at 2:20 pm

My level six death stare clearly needs some work. I've tried using it on my son, and he just laughs at the funny faces Mommy is making. (Okay, maybe it's level three or four – he's only two after all.)

And I agree framing a grocery bag is important. My first job was as a grocery store cashier, and although there was no video, it's fairly obvious what things should go together. Though I occasionally got weird requests. One guy asked for “the white paper bags,” refused
Frame or not frame. There is no try | The Bleat.

11/8/13, 8:55 AM

to believe they were plastic, and started bagging his things himself. Then he insisted he wanted everything in one bag, even though he had started with bread. What could I do? He wanted me to plunk his milk on top of his bread, okay sir! Have some flatbread!

Now I usually go to the self checkout line and bag my groceries myself. Even better, one store has little handheld scanners you can use to scan your card, then take through the store, scanning items and packing your bags as you go. Sadly, it's neither the closest nor the cheapest supermarket.

SeanF says:
December 6, 2010 at 2:31 pm

My Dad had “the look” down pat. He was a cop, and I’m sure it came in handy when questioning suspects. He could (and on occasion did) make a kid he didn’t even know cry from twenty feet away, without make a noise. The parents generally had no idea what had upset the child.

And as for the children embarrassing you? I was once behind a woman at the return counter at Best Buy who was returning a cordless phone. “It just doesn’t work,” she said.

“Yeah,” said one of her kids from behind her. “It doesn’t work because you *dropped* it.”

The other kid responded “I didn’t drop it! *You* dropped it!” just as Mom was turning around to give them both the stink-eye, which appeared to me to include more than a bit of guilt.

The clerk didn’t say a word, but after finishing up and she had walked away, he turned to his coworker with a grin on his face and asked, “Did you hear that?”

DryOwlTacos says:
December 6, 2010 at 3:06 pm

Jasper looks like he has a little smile on his face. Good dog.

Yesterday at Lowe’s, another employee handed the cashier a cookie while he was checking us out, which of course he commenced to eat. I don't think he got crumbs in the bag with my paint, but that's beside the point.

The current annoyance when using the attended checkout is when you purchase a 12-pack of drinks and the cashier immediately breaks out the “handle” by sticking his/her hand into it. I always protest (sometimes at volume) that if I wanted the box broken open, I would do it myself. Grr.

My dearhusband, who worked in Customer Service back when the terms weren't mutually exclusive, knows the way to turn the cashier's full attention to the customer is to strike up an idle conversation about how busy it seems in the store today and much longer he/she has to work. We find that most know, to the fraction of a minute, how much longer is their shift.

Dave (in MA) says:
December 6, 2010 at 3:11 pm

I found out the hard way once that no matter how well “framed” the goods are, as you carry your groceries into the house, apple stems can saw their way through the plastic bags which give way just as
you reach the top step.

**GardenStater** says:
December 6, 2010 at 3:32 pm

@Peter DeVries: “…ripping off the pizza house.”

Umm, no.

James would be “ripping off the pizza house” if he got the pizza he ordered, then called and lied about it, then insisted on two free pizzas. Assuming he’s not “ripping off” his readers, and is indeed providing a factual account of the events, he got the wrong thing, it was cold, and he called to let the pizzeria know. The manager then did the smart thing by offering to make it better, and avoid losing a regular customer.

There’s nothing wrong with lodging a complaint if you don’t get what you’re paying for. I’m sure James was civil and polite when he called.

**swschrard** says:
December 6, 2010 at 3:33 pm

see above comment on plastic bags (stinkeye.)

we have standardized at our household on the fake-European type carry bags. we have a mix of one home-improvement center and two grocery chains that are polyglotted into two sac-o-sacks, one for each car.

the handles don’t rip out, the contents almost never poke a hole in the bag and spill… the only fault is the freakin’ sorta-cloth handles insist on going inside the bag, and snarl around your hands like a nest of vipers as you’re trying to stuff the bags.

**swschrard** says:
December 6, 2010 at 3:34 pm

NEST of vipers.

unless you’re checking out the next Geraldo 😛

**Kevin** says:
December 6, 2010 at 3:46 pm

I agree that everyone should have a job where they work with the public. It makes you a more reasonable customer; among other things, it teaches you that the person at whom you are screaming probably has absolutely NO input about the policies he or she is compelled to enforce.

I worked in an S&L in north Berkeley for four years, and on the whole it was quite interesting. If one had the time and the inclination, one could find someone that could talk about any possible topic, from music to statistics to garlic-cooking. We had professors, we had students, we had both a murderer and a murder victim among our customers, musicians, writers, and a couple of bank robbers or three. (And it got my attention one day in 1985 or so to see the woman walk in who was arrested along with Patty Hearst. I did a quick mental Google search of my memory— was she arrested for bank robbery? Just came in to cash a check, as it happened.) Berkeley ideology, of course, was free, and freely dispensed by those for whom their convictions seldom exacted any
personal cost or privation.

**Teresa** says:
December 6, 2010 at 3:57 pm

Speaking as someone who was at one time so broke that any loss of a grocery item was a major disaster, I wholeheartedly agree with your attitude. While it is no longer the case that I might cry because some food item is damaged beyond repair when they pack my groceries, I still remember the horrid sinking sensation. I know there are others out there struggling as much as I was at one time.

If they do it to one person, they do it to all. So you may have saved some poor person from trying to figure out how they’ll feed their family this week because the packer cracked all the eggs in a carton or crushed the loaf of bread.

**JohnW** says:
December 6, 2010 at 4:12 pm

chrisbcritter:
“And remember, the celery goes on top. Vertically.”

But doesn’t that destroy all elasticity in the waistband of your underclothes? Or is that only when boarding municipal transport?

**Jan** says:
December 6, 2010 at 6:42 pm

Did child understand the reference, “And it goes to eleven…?”

If so, then your parenting role has been successfully completed, and you can sit back and relax.

**Al Federber** says:
December 6, 2010 at 6:56 pm

I understand James’ feelings about the distracted Target clerk, but I think it does little good to complain to either the clerk or management. Bottom line is: they don’t actually care.

I agree with other posters that James set a bad example for Natalie with the pizza mini-scam. Then, when she spoke up about it, James glared at her so harshly that she thought he was going to strike her. That’s just bad. Hitting (“spanking”) kids teaches them only one thing: that it’s okay to use violence to get your way.

I wonder if they teach that at the church James attends?

**lanczos** says:
December 6, 2010 at 7:19 pm

Ahhh, Jimmeh, Jimmeh, Jimmeh -

In the pizza situation, you’re already Banging Head against the Prototypical Female Lament: “Can’t We All Just Get Along?”

But the Other Side Of That Coin is That Other Female “Triad Tradition”: “Let’s Me And You Gang Up On Her…”
CaliforniaJeff says:
December 6, 2010 at 9:47 pm

1. Al Federber, you're base, or just can't detect nuanced self-deprecating humor. There's no need to rant against your host. Go back and read again after turning off the Kneejerk switch.

2. James, I'm running Mac OS 10.6.5 on Safari 5.0.3: the “Older Comments” link is always inaccessible because it appears inside the box of the first person's comment that appears on that page: when I mouseover the link, it disappears, and the comment box highlights, as if the link is underneath, somehow. Firefox is the same. You fiddlewidit, maybe? :^)

shesnailie says:
December 6, 2010 at 10:19 pm

_@_v – lick a light switch already al…

kahall says:
December 6, 2010 at 11:40 pm

Ahh, not enough sauce on the pizza and Target. I am not sure why but I was laughing my butt off while reading it. Then I read some of the comments and my buzz was gone.

RJ says:
December 7, 2010 at 12:40 am

@California Jeff:

You are probably making a mistake to think that Al F. is expressing an honest erroneous opinion.

His goal, as far as I can tell, is to slag our host using any excuse possible. It doesn't have to make sense if Al can construct an ugly slam.

Lileks says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:14 am

Hmm. Really? Sigh. Eliza, I complained because I got a lousy pizza. The driver did not risk his life; the store is 15 blocks from my house, which wasn't a 45-minute run. If he harbors any resentment, it may be tempered by the fact that I tipped him five bucks on a $14.79 order. If there's anything I want to teach my daughter, it's tempering self-assertion with civility, and vice versa.

Also, as others have noted, I'm kinda sorta exaggerating this for fun.

CMT says:
December 7, 2010 at 2:16 am

When you have to order “extra sauce” on a pizza, civilization has already sunk. Extra sauce should be the pizza default, and anyone who wants less should have to specify “I want a dry flavorless circle of bread and cheese, please”.

zefal says:
December 7, 2010 at 2:16 am
Just think of all the suckers who never complain when their orders are royally screwed up. Mr Lileks isn't just setting a wrong done to him right but all those folks too. I support Mr. Lileks all the way but still appreciate Miss Natalie's empathy.

BTW, you think I get one of those free pizzas, Jim?

Mark E. Hurling says:
December 7, 2010 at 11:50 am

Al, your seasonal affective disorder has obviously kicked in, you couldn't even get the day right to launch a backdoor attack against Our Genial Host. It should have today.

Susan says:
December 7, 2010 at 12:31 pm

I wonder if my geriatric old dog remembers the snow in the Midwest as she lays in the warm Arizona sunshine?

MNFermata says:
December 7, 2010 at 9:05 pm

Do you think you were the only person ordering pizza Friday night? When the delivery person goes out they don't take one pizza at a time, deliver it, and then go back for another. They take several and the chances yours is going to be the first one delivered when you live 15 blocks from the store are remote.

When you also consider that Friday night it was snowing pretty heavily, enough so that a drive of 6 blocks can take 20 minutes by itself (I'm not exaggerating. I made a fast-food run that night to a place 3 blocks away, and I was gone for 25 minutes). The traffic and roads were terrible and I'd say you're pretty lucky you got your pizza that fast. You want your pizza hot? Go pick it up. Chances are by the time you got it home in that weather it would have still been cold. Who would you blame then?

I'm not some disgruntled ex-deliveryman, but I do have a reasonable idea of what to expect on what's already going to be a busy night for pizza delivery (Friday) coupled with traffic-crippling snow.

Joni says:
December 8, 2010 at 7:34 am

I can't BELIEVE how cranky the commenters on this blog are (and not just in relation to Pizzagate, but... everything.) Which is kind of surprising considering this is one of the funnest blogs I've ever read. My theory? It's because Our Host dares to be unapologetically cheerful, and even celebratory of cheesy-pop-culture from the Seventies (and other decades), and in our Days of Gloom And Angst, this simply isn't done. So the commenters need to make sure that this little pocket of sunshine is as infested with bitterness as is the rest of the Internets.

(LOL, the pizza delivery guy was ‘risking his life’! So, in a way, are all of us when we get in a car or, you know, breathe and stuff. For heavens' sake, what is a pizza delivery guy's JOB, if not delivering pizzas? It isn't as if he is delivering vaccinations by sled dog through the Yukon.)
Joe Doakes says:
December 8, 2010 at 4:32 pm

You tipped the driver who successfully dodged the morons on the road, then slogged through snow up to his butt to bring your pizza. Correct. He's doing his best to the limit of his abilities under trying circumstances.

You called the store to complain. Again, correct. Management controls manufacture of the product as well as the number and route of drivers. Order not right? Train cooks better. Bad weather slows deliveries? Call in more drivers.

As a loyal and repeat customer, you were doing the pizza company a favor to notify them that their service was not up to their own standards. As a responsible business, they appreciated knowing it and rewarded your candor with free product. Win-win.

As for embarrassing your daughter, that's a kid thing at her age. It won't get better for a dozen years yet – going off to college works wonders. Ignore it – every other kid in the history of humanity has gotten over it, she will, too.

Fred says:
December 11, 2010 at 10:18 am

Apropos of the whole pizza affair, the picture brings to mind the thought that once ole Jasper has moved on the the big backyard in the sky there are going to be a lot of people mourning who have never even seen him in person.

Seattle Dave says:
December 12, 2010 at 3:05 am

Wow. Do some of you people (Al, Eliza) actually read all those pesky little words that make up the Bleat before you post your comments? Just wondering, because the comments seem to bear little connection to what James has written.
Frame or not frame. There is no try | The Bleat.

Please install and activate the "Twitter for WordPress" plugin to use this section.

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?
Did I mention we got the tree up? It's fake. It's lovely. It gave me a rash. After I assembled the tree I felt a distinct itch on my forearms; examination under strong light revealed a pattern of welts consistent with contact with the faux fir. Since no one else came down with weeping hives, it's probably just me. Can't blame the tree. I love the tree. One more year and it pays off. To be honest, I grew tired of the yearly trial – picking out some big stout dead giant leaning against a fence in a store, or on the Boy Scout lot. Eighty bucks for dead wood. You bring it in the home, stick the trunk in water, but unless there's a hydraulic elevator and a thunderstorm raging above, the chances you'll exult IT'S ALIVE, IT'S ALIVE are slim to none. When Christmas is over and you wrap the corpse in the shroud, drag it down the stairs, every branch shedding a thousand needles when it brushes up against the adamantine surfaces of the door and the stoop and the stairs, you tire of the mess, the trouble. My dad has an artificial, and he doesn't even take the decorations off. January 2, down it goes. December 1, up it comes. Plug it in. Good to do. Not there yet. Last night we festooned Cyborg Fir with all the treats and geegaws accumulated over the years, and each has its own story. That's why I love putting up the tree: the tales. Granted, they're boring – this ornament I got at Pentagon City for opening up a Macy's account! – but they're part of the family lore. This means the daughter rolls her eyes when you get out a tarnished silver cup: BABY'S FIRST CHRISTMAS. Oh please, you guys and your emotional attachment to me, how embarrassing to incorporeal internet friends who may, theoretically, at this moment be judging me. For the last
two years, though, she's been disdainful of childhood ornaments; not this year. This year Hello Kitty is BACK, because she's Japanese and cute. She even put up a Strawberry Shortcake ornament.

“Remember that Cookie game?” I said. “We could never figure that out.”

“No, we did,” she said. “We finished that one.”

Bonding over game outcomes expressed through small plastic licensed figurines: Nerdmas.

I like finding recent ornaments whose origins speak to modern interests, however defined; there was a classic Steamboat-Willie-era Mickey ornament we got at the Christmas store in Downtown Disney, and it spoke volumes. Not of Mickey himself – you can project anything on that fellow – but the moment when we found him, and the pre-post-modern values he somehow embodies. Surely I'm not the only person who takes pleasure in an ornament because it exemplifies virtues and values we assume have passed from the scene. That's what all the ornaments are about. They're all about a perfect day in December, Christmas a week away, when the basics are observed and the traditions honored. There is sledding and a tree and popcorn strung on strings and a carol sung. Noses are red. Cider is provided. You're about eleven or so, caught between the disavowal of Santa and the treacherous shoals of adolescence, and the Then and the Now wrap around you like a warm quilt. It's a marvelous age.

As I've said, they can all be marvelous ages. But. Know thine Dickens. I'm sure someone has written an extensive analysis of the story, and deduced whether its power was an act of artifice or subconscious genius rushing out of the point of his pen. The beauty of the story is how it fixes the apotheosis in the Now, a moment that has power because it has seen what was – promise, pleasure, the roots of your current discontent boring into the earth – and it has seen what is to come, which is a bony pointing finger and a stone slab. Scrooge wakes, but his awakening changes neither state. The past is still an unanswered plea, the future is still a chisel poised over a piece of rock, waiting for the particulars. But now! Oh, now! This we have; let us make merry, and dance complicated gavottes that sublimate sexual tension, and have a toddy, and carve the goose. Yes, I know, it's all swiped from Saturnalia. Except that the Christians managed a neat little trick: it's an ephemeral event grounded in the eternal. Grapple with that how you like.

To my surprise I am in the Christmas mood ahead of schedule. The snow helps. Tonight I loaded up my iTunes and iPod with Christmas playlists – I lean towards the swank and the 60s middlebrow, since those were the strains of my childhood. Doris Day, Maurice Chevalier, Eugene Ormandy. Latter-life additions: the cigarette-saturated whisky-laments of the Jackie Gleason Orchestra, and yes I know that sounds like real black-velvet-Elvis stuff, but it's wonderful. Most Christmas music post-68 leaves me cold. When we put up the tree I tuned in the DirecTV music channel, as usual, and this year it was pretty good: not so much contemporary artists over-emoting the standards,
lots of classic 60s tunes, a few bluesmen pitched into the mix to remind you that the season can pierce the thick hood of diminished expectations worn by sad, slightly obese men with guitars who have not only been done wrong, but woke up this morning to discover they had been done wrong.

I got out the oldest ornament, a plastic angel I hung on my door when I lived on Irving Av., writing my first novel. I got out the small felt angel dog, looked at Jasper, thought you made another year, friend. I found the reindeer horns and put them on his head, and he shook wore them for a while, sitting on his pillow. I thought: he's old and he doesn't care.

Then he stood up and shook them off and trotted over to the bin with the ornaments, and stuck his nose inside, and maybe he thought: I remember this.

The tree is up. The snow is deep. Packages arrive at the door every day. Here we go. I'm in the mood, and that's a surprise. Usually takes longer. The whys or hows are irrelevant: enjoy.

And you?

(note: “angle dog” changed to “angel dog.” Yes, I rely on spellcheck. I was exhausted last night; checked for red squiggly lines, then hit post.)

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85 RESPONSES TO most wonderful, etc

GardenStater says:  
December 7, 2010 at 12:32 pm

My favorite PDQ Bach piece is “Throw the Yule Log on Uncle John.” Funny stuff.

Mlle. Badger says:  
December 7, 2010 at 12:38 pm

My ex-husband wasn’t Jewish (I am), and when Christmas came ’round I thought: “Oh, boy! Now I can finally have a Christmas tree without having to rationalize it! Yippee!” But that was not to be. He hated Christmas trees and (I suspect) enjoyed denying me the pleasure of having one.

Now I’m married to a nice Jewish boy from New Jersey whose family always had a Christmas tree (until the boys were old enough to be Bar Mitzvahed, and then they started feeling weird about it), and he loves Christmas trees. So now I not only have a Christmas tree, I have a pink, artificially lit (with pink lights), Christmas tree. Happy am I, joy is my name!

swschrad says:  
December 7, 2010 at 12:43 pm
my wife was down with flu and ear and sinus infections last week, so we don't have the trees up.

trees, plural. the tree from the previous marriage somehow got pulled from their house before that was also lost, and while she was in the duplex before we got married, we hosed it down solidly and put it up. that's losing pieces here and there, and the top breaks off regularly and needs more epoxy, so that's the fake tree out on the high deck. fill it with LED lights and string some garland, hook it to another remote on/off box, something fun while we're eating.

the living room gets a newer tree, from the norsky Botique of the Staffordshire Terrier, that we bought off the floor December 24th at 5 pm and stuffed into the back of the Taurus in Fargo. all the two-family stuff, with some LED ice cubes to add this year.

when we get the basement redone and move the media center down there, we have a boxed new prelit tree from a couple years ago for that. this one will become the two-family tree, and we are going to do the dedicated-closet deal with it. after all, we're getting older and tireder.

fired up the Christmas mix on the 'pod in exercise yesterday, need to work it over a little bit as usual each year. I'll bring in the garage dock while we're setting up the tree, and then load the DVD changer with Dean Martin, Andy Williams, Jeff Foskett's *Christmas On The Beach*, the MTC, and so on.

Spud says:
December 7, 2010 at 12:46 pm

@GardenStater: Welcome to the 6th decade club. Your “I can’t believe how fast the years flew by” button will be in the mail shortly, after you get all of those wonderful AARP letters. And don’t worry about your body breaking down, it happens to most everybody (except Cher and David Hasselhoff).

If I have to listen to Christmas music I’m a little partial to Elvis and Ray Conniff singers. We have one of those stations that plays insipid music after Halloween. It turns my stomach to hear “Jingle Bell Rock” or any other “rock” song that contains enough Christmas buzz words to get airplay. The John Lennon song makes me break out in hives, as well as anything by the Beach Boys. Ah, enough kvetching…

Our fake tree with lights went up Saturday, just as we got a rare December snow in Mayberry. The fake tree is “awright”, but it is heavy and can be difficult to store. I do like the tradition of decorating the tree on Christmas Eve followed by bringing it down on Boxing Day, but I yield to my lovely and talented wife and let her have fun with the decorations.

MattS says:
December 7, 2010 at 12:46 pm

Since MJBirch brings up Christmas movies, here are some overlooked favorites:

Die Hard (“Ho. Ho. Ho. Now I have a machine gun.”)

*Gremlins*

Ha ha and all that. Seriously, if you haven't seen “Love Actually” it's a really fine yet adult (R-rated) British comedy.
Also, I'm not a Will Ferrell fan but “Elf” is goofy, warm-spirited fun (my kids went camping last year and we saw raccoons in the campsite in the middle of the night and they – the kids – all said “who wants a hug?”).

We only just added the ORIGINAL “Miracle on 34th” and “A Christmas Carol” to the rotation last year. The typical kid stuff – the Rankin-Bass animated stuff, “A Wish for Wings That Work,” “A Charlie Brown Christmas”, etc. – all round out the Christmas viewing schedule. I have to admit I rather miss the pre-DVD and DVR days when the air date for Rudolph was an event you planned around, if you were a kid. Made it more special, somehow.

RLR says:
December 7, 2010 at 12:49 pm

Let’s see, nonsensical Christian bombast plus casual dismissal of an entire genre of American music?

Maybe you’ll do better tomorrow.

Stan Smith says:
December 7, 2010 at 12:52 pm

Growing up in a mountainous area of New Mexico, my family would purchase a permit from the Forest Service to cut our own tree, chosen from FS land. The whole family, including dog at the time, would trek through the snow and choose an appropriately-shaped evergreen, and then hoist it on top of the car to take home. We still buy a “dead wood” tree from some group that’s using the season to earn a little money for their organization; this year it was the Lomita Little League. We have the usual “meaningful” ornaments that MUST be hung each year.

As for music, I cleave to the songs that have a meaning beyond the season: the Kingston Trio’s version of “Mary Mild”, which tells a tale of Jesus as a young boy, refused playtime by a group of “royal sons” because he’s “a poor maid’s child, born in an oxen stall.” So the young Son of G*d performs a miracle: “I built them a bridge of the beams of the sun, so they would play with me.”

Or Harry Belafonte’s rendition of “Borning Day,” telling of a possible meeting of the Holy Family with peasants in the West Indies:

“Mary and the baby hungry
Yes, we know what hungry be
So we bring them peas and rice
And a little ginger tea
Only pigeon peas and rice
A little ginger tea
Mary thank us with her eyes
She poor the same as we
She poor the same as we

Mary and the baby lonely
Lonely is not good to be
So we sit awhile and chat awhile
To keep them company
Stay awhile makes the baby smile
Pass the time of day
When we see how pleased they be
It make us glad we stay
So glad that we could stay
Mary and the baby weary
Oh, we know what weary be
So we make a bed and pillow for their head
With down from the muhow tree
Only down from the muhow tree
To rest them soft and good
We feel bad this was all we had
We do the best we could
We do the best we could

Mary and the baby rest easy
We go away and let them be
On hush tip toe and voice kept low
We look up and see
Stars of hope shine in the sky
To mark the baby's birth
Seemed to say it's borning day
Of better times on earth
Of better times on earth"

This captures the spirit of the season better than any other carol, for me.

LS says:
December 7, 2010 at 12:59 pm

I miss the smell of a live tree. 30-some years ago my folks bought a little stumpy 3-foot live scotch fir for Christmas, which we planted in the back yard afterwards. Until recently, I could still see it on Google maps — towering over my boyhood home.

bgbear says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:00 pm

_Die Hard (“Ho. Ho. Ho. Now I have a machine gun.”)._ 

If i ever had a gram of Lileks' web patience/skill/energy I was going to do a site that has movies with Christmas scenes but, were not Christmas movies in the usual sense. “Die Hard” would be top on the list.

Spud says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:04 pm

@MJBirch (and others who are struggling with lost jobs or missing family members): hang in there – praying for you. It can be a difficult time of year when everyone else seems to be celebrating but you can't seem to get there.

Favorite Christmas movie: “Scrooge” with Albert Finney. I still get a little misty-eyed when he asks the spirit of Christmas present “Take me away, I can bear it no more”. For those who may have a little extra cash, seeing “The Polar Express” at the IMAX is a real treat, especially for the children. It ain't cheap, though.

I did break down and used some of my iTunes balance to buy “A Baby Changes Everything” by Faith Hill. A baby did/does change everything.
metaphizzle says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:04 pm

Christmas music for me:

Jazz stuff: *Christmas '64* by organist Jimmy Smith. Restoration Hardware's first two *Christmas with a Kick* compilations. The *Verve Remixed Christmas* compilation, featuring rearrangements of Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, etc. *A Charlie Brown Christmas* by the Vince Guaraldi Trio.


Rock stuff: *Christmas Songs* by Jars of Clay. The first three volumes of Tooth & Nail Records *Happy Christmas* series. Trans-Siberian Orchestra, they of “Christmas Eve (Sarajevo 12/24)” which is the definitive rock arrangement of “Carol of the Bells”, and “Wizard in Winter” aka “that song that overzealous house decorators like to synchronize their Christmas lights with in those youtube videos”.

A class of his own: *Songs for Christmas* by Sufjan Stevens. An odd melange of styles that puts me in a unique mood, hovering between melancholia and joy and holy terror.

Kerry Potenza says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:23 pm

@MJBirch: You are not alone in your unemployed angst. I don’t pray in the conventional sense, but will mention you in my nightly “talk”. We’ve been hit hard here in the littlest state in the USA. Two of my husband’s best friends got laid off last month as well as our newlywed nephew-in-law. Hard times, and we don’t want to forget those who are struggling. I have some extra special toys to donate to Toys for Tots this year and encourage those who are able to do so to contribute also. FWIW, I’m far from rich. My wealth is derived from family and friends.

MattS says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:27 pm

@Spud: Can’t believe I forgot “Polar Express” since that was the last Christmas movie I watched, Sunday evening. A modern classic, in my opinion.

I have an odd reaction to the actual North Pole section of the movie, though – it’s very imaginative and extremely well-rendered (as is the entire movie) but it just comes off as sort of… creepy, with the piped-in Christmas music and deserted feeling.

Watching those “out of control” train ride sequences in 2-D on a moderately-sized HD TV are thrilling enough; I can imagine how cool it must be in IMAX and/or 3-D.

swschrad says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:30 pm

@Kerry Potenza @MJBirch: the greatest gift is not Stuff. it is love. hug your family and embrace Jesus.

for the best of us, the trappings of the season are reminders of the miracle, not time to one-up the neighbors and get on the limo tour.
I will gratefully acknowledge that once in a rare while, I feel it.

gilzmo says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:52 pm

For those of you who said you enjoy non-traditional music fare, consider Dwight Yoakam’s “Come On Christmas” album which includes two original songs: The title track, which would make those bluesmen James was talking about suddenly realize they never really knew sadness, and “Santa Can’t Stay,” a great rocking/swinging glimpse into a dysfunctional family holiday that is both hilarious and deeply troubling—all in one package! Can’t think of too many songs that are able to pull that off. Anyway, a couple of offbeat tunes to add to your twisted Christmas collections.

hpoulter says:
December 7, 2010 at 2:59 pm

Right on, Swschrad.

juanito - John Davey says:
December 7, 2010 at 3:27 pm

MattS says:
December 7, 2010 at 1:27 pm

@Spud: Can’t believe I forgot “Polar Express” since that was the last Christmas movie I watched, Sunday evening. A modern classic, in my opinion.

Watching those “out of control” train ride sequences in 2-D on a moderately-sized HD TV are thrilling enough; I can imagine how cool it must be in IMAX and/or 3-D.

Took my 9 year old to see it in IMAX when she was 6 – she covered her eyes and buried her face in my shoulder during the out of control train ride sequence. But she did reach out to try to “grab” the snowflakes as they fell in 3D in the opening sequence. THAT was worth the price of admission.

Taking the 9 year old and the 6 year old ON the Polar Express Thursday evening. Leaves from the California Railroad Museum in Old Sacramento. If the wait staff does not leap about the dining car and bound off the walls while pouring Hot Chocolate! sideways across the car…… I will be disappointed.

Maharincess of Franistan says:
December 7, 2010 at 5:30 pm

A few years ago I was going crazy trying to find a Christmas album my parents played when I was a kid, in the ’50s and ’60s. I was positive it was Mantovani, since everything they played on their “hi-fi” was Mantovani, but it wasn’t. What I remembered was that the album included “Little Brown Jug,” which scandalized my mother because it seemed sacriligeous for a Christmas album. After hectic googling, I finally discovered it was by a Brit named George Melachrino. (Melachrino? Sounds like a fancy cigar, a South American dessert or a photographic process.) Anyway, thanks to Amazon.com, it is now mine. What a rush to hear something you haven’t heard for half a century but still remember vividly!
@FreeState: A couple of years ago we went to a crafts fair that included the work of Rick Devin, who creates fabric sculptures — many of them avian. We couldn't resist a little cardinal, who was a cardinal in 2 senses of the word (bird and cleric, not baseball or football player). http://www.devinicals.com/pb/wp_fe45e322.html?0.251322414838908

swschrad says:
December 7, 2010 at 5:53 pm

dare I mention the picture for today's submission reminds me of The Man With All The Toys?  

whoever sings high, I'll double 'em.

Brian Lutz says:
December 7, 2010 at 6:00 pm

I need to put up a tree (I've got company coming for dinner next Sunday, so it'll probably happen before then) but I've been dealing with space issues in my new apartment (smaller than my old one, but about 73% yupper at the same time, so it all works out) so I don't know what I'm supposed to do with a tree for the other 11 months out of the year. I also lost most of my ornament collection to water damage in the storage closet earlier this year, so I'm starting over on those. There was a time a couple of years ago when I started getting really cynical about the whole Christmas bit, but that was probably more a matter of circumstances than anything. Still, I really don't get into it until just a couple of days before the actual day.

Baby M says:
December 7, 2010 at 6:23 pm

Ah, I see our genial host has broken out the mighty '65 Goodyear Christmas LP. We had it when I was growing up, and I could listen to Anna Maria Alberghetti and Diahann Carroll all day. I used to dislike the Steve-&-Edie-on-uppers rendition of “Sleigh Ride” because I thought it was over the top; today, I am mature enough to realize it's part of the charm. Maurice Chevalier's heavily-accented pseudo-rap I could live without, then and now, but I forgive Goodyear. The overpowering majesty of “We Three Kings,” Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra with the throttles at full war emergency power, more than atones for Maurice.

Paul in NJ says:
December 7, 2010 at 7:18 pm

Speaking of your first novel, some people believe it's worth some real simoleans these days. (Other sellers, not so much.)

Old Dad says:
December 7, 2010 at 7:27 pm

Now that's a Bleet!

Thanks and Merry Christmas
Joni says:
December 7, 2010 at 8:20 pm

Music: for me, it's the Muppets, or nothing. But I'm of THAT generation. I was born Dec. 5, 1979, the day the John Denver special aired. (I checked with my mom later: she was gorked out on drugs, and didn't watch it. That's it, Mom, I'm sticking you in a home someday.)

swschrad says:
December 7, 2010 at 8:36 pm

@Joni: it's not easy being green. unless you're gorked out on drugs. dude.

throw a few F-bombs in there, a little pimp 'n' ho, and you've got a Christmas rap.

Bob Lipton says:
December 7, 2010 at 9:13 pm

Oh, and speaking of cyborg christmas trees....

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZPTJcqM7QM

Bob

Pencilpal says:
December 7, 2010 at 9:49 pm

@Tom – in my neck of the 'sylvania:
http://www.achillesportfolio.com/treecartoon.htm

pfsm says:
December 8, 2010 at 12:17 am

Ersatz tree for us too, which in a way is odd since Douglas firs grow everywhere like weeds and I pull dozens of seedlings every year. They'll grow in pit-run gravel; they try to grow on the road shoulders but die in the summer sun.

Having a real tree in the lobby at college in Des Moines was more important, because the Iowa winters were monochrome with black tree branches against the white snow which became gray if it hung around for a while as it mostly did, because a lot of people burned coal there in the mid-50's. Two winters like that were enough for me.

Ornaments though, that's different. We've got ones I made, the daughter made, ancient glass balls from when we got married in 1962, a reclining frog with a Santa hat, a tiny '56 Ford pickup, and for all I know a new one or two.

Mark Storer says:
December 8, 2010 at 1:48 am

James-
May I kindly suggest the California Guitar Trio Christmas album? If you don't like it, I'll pay for it. It's a bonafide guarantee. It has become my favorite of the season.

Thanks for your writing.
Mark

MJBirch says:
December 8, 2010 at 10:47 am

John Ferrante. Of course! Heading to the Schickele website NOW.

And to all who so kindly wished me the best, and better luck economically — many thanks.

And the same back at ya.

The Aardvark says:
December 10, 2010 at 1:00 am

Thank you. It hit me a few weeks ago that the reason the oh-so-beautiful trees in the stores feel so empty is the lack of connection, of history. We put up our tree, artificial, fiber optic AND twinkly bulbs, festooned with the ornaments collected and gifted over the decades, and it was right. It felt right. It had substance, the stuff of memories and life.

Spud – amen to “Scrooge”.

Kev says:
December 10, 2010 at 8:10 am

a few bluesmen pitched into the mix to remind you that the season can pierce the thick hood of diminished expectations worn by sad, slightly obese men with guitars who have not only been done wrong, but woke up this morning to discover they had been done wrong.

Classic. You know the joke about how if you play a country record backwards, you get your dog and wife back, and your pickup truck starts running again? If you play a blues record backwards, your woman does you right and you get to go to bed at night.

Ryan says:
December 10, 2010 at 11:25 am

What in the blergh? Real trees cost *EIGHTY DOLLARS* now? We just got a new fake tree for our family room, had to get a skinny one that will fit in the corner blocked off by two couches (so that the little one can’t pull it over on himself), and it was $100. Looks fantastic. The branches were so full that we had trouble getting all our decorations on.

Ryan says:
December 10, 2010 at 11:25 am

Oh, and I get rashy from contact with the fake trees too. Since nobody else is actually lifting and carrying the trees in the house, I blame it on something on the insides of the branches. 😖

Kimberley says:
December 14, 2010 at 2:10 am

We downsized from a truly glorious artificial tree to one for feet tall. I miss the big one, but understand why my husband (the lugger and assembler) wanted to do it. One plus, other than the ease with which it's assembled, is the way every ornament means something
now. With the big trees we had through the years, we had a lot of plain ornaments up as filler. We have some odd items hanging on our tree; a small silver choker chain, our 8-year-old dog Emma's wee puppy collar, adorns it each year. That collar won't make it past her eyes now. We put it over her snout every year and laugh about what a scrawny little thing she was at ten weeks old. Someday, when she's gone, that collar will be held in our hands, caressed with our fingertips, as we talk about how silly she looked with that tiny collar encircling her face each year. Then, we will put it in its place of honor for the season.
The Great Pizza Debate continues. I have to repost from the comments:

*Do you think you were the only person ordering pizza Friday night?*

No. This, however, does not mean I should expect cold pizza. There's no warning issued ahead of time: It's Friday. Pizza May Be Cold.

*When the delivery person goes out they don't take one pizza at a time, deliver it, and then go back for another. They take several and the chances yours is going to be the first one delivered when you live 15 blocks from the store are remote.*

Actually, considering their delivery radius, I wouldn't be surprised if I was one of the first deliveries. I think the driver was new, and didn't know where my house was. I've never seen him before.

*When you also consider that Friday night it was snowing pretty heavily, enough so that a drive of 6 blocks can take 20 minutes by itself (I'm not exaggerating. I made a fast-food run that night to a place 3 blocks away, it took 20 minutes, give or take).*
I am the ferryman, coo-coo-ka-choo | The Bleat.

and I was gone for 25 minutes. The traffic and roads were terrible and I’d say you’re pretty lucky you got your pizza that fast. You want your pizza hot? Go pick it up.

And there’s the point at which we part company, perhaps. I love that. It’s honest.

Chances are by the time you got it home in that weather it would have still been cold. Who would you blame then?

I’m not some disgruntled ex-deliveryman, but I do have a reasonable idea of what to expect on what’s already going to be a busy night for pizza delivery (Friday) coupled with traffic-crippling snow.

Okay then! Here’s the deal. If the pizza shows up cold, how about I pay half price? Late I understand. Late doesn’t bother me. Cold and congealed: no. This does not give me license to stiff the driver or yell at the manager, but apparently expressing dissatisfaction in a civil tone is also not appropriate. Pay up and shut up! Eat it! Noted.

An ordinary day, with incremental accomplishments. No triumphs, no banners unfurled against the sky, no trumpets hailing my passage. Some days you feel as if the day is just another marble dropped in a bag you carry around your neck – so heavy, so ungainly, but would you prefer the alternative? Other days a wind celestial fills your sails and the past matters nothing compared to the dazzling future, complete with lens flairs. And then some days you decide that this new computer program was worth every dollar because it adds tabs to the Finder, and dinner was good, and the fiction today passed muster, and the dog’s back leg is better. All in all, that’ll do. Plus, daughter wore jeans for the first time today. Whatever my expression was, she insisted that I GET OVER IT because they were just jeans, GOSH. It’s one of those milestones, perhaps. They grow up day by day but you always snag your own shroud on the mileposts. Getting older.

I remember when I first got jeans: seventh grade. Wranglers, probably. Husky, probably; I was a fat kid. Previously: garish gawdawful 70s patterns in fabrics that made your flesh twitch with revulsion. jeans were regarded with disdain in my house – “dungarees,” my Dad called them – but they relented, and I wore them to school expecting life to change. It did not. No, it would take a slim paperback book of insults to rearrange my social status. It was the “Book of Insults,” by Louis Safian, no doubt compiled to capitalize on the school of insult comics, and it was essentially a guide to playing the dozens, with fewer Yo Mama jokes and better grammar. I memorized chunks of it, and drew blood in science class. Shortly after I had assumed the uniform of jeans, I was heading into school – Ben Franklin Junior – when the king-hell popular kid, all-around alpha and athletic hero, Ted G., fell alongside and asked me to say some of those insults he’d been hearing about. Go on, insult me. You can imagine the heady thrill: my transitions to dungarees has been
seamless and free from mockery, and now the big dogs are asking for the privilege of being insulted by the recognized master.

Eventually I was unmasked – a nemesis in science class discovered my source material, memorized some choice insults, and tried to compete. But his delivery was weak, uncertain. I demolished him. None of this translated into actual bedrock popularity; as a fat kid who had only recently started wearing jeans, I was just a horse who could stamp four times when asked to add two plus two. But I learned a few things from this. My entire career probably goes back to this. I should thank Louis Safian in my next book: without whom none of this, and so on.

Wanted to address this last night, but my head was hitting the keyboards by the time I was done. It had to do with a comment that was – shock! – judging my parenthoodedness. Because I had LIED in front of my daughter about the coldness of the pizza, and hence had fallen in her estimation because she knew the truth.

Er, yeah. This is modern life in the tell-all social media world: it’s almost 1 AM, and you’re thinking, should I repeat the facts on the ground in order to reaffirm that I was completely within my rights to give my daughter a hard stare because her utterance about the pizza’s temperature was based on her inexplicable horror of seeing Dad kindly complain about the quality of a product? Because it was COLD. And then you think, well, no, go to bed. Sweet dreams!

As if:

I know it’s tedious when people recount their dreams, but bear with me. It began simply enough; I was supposed to drive a flimsy aluminum skiff from a beach to a private island, and my passengers were two dead relatives: my cousin and his father.

See? It had my attention right there. I’m a charon-kind-a-guy, apparently. When we got to the location I took a wrong turn, and was unable to get to the dock. With the standard scene-switching common to dreams, I was in a shopping mall, but I understood this to be a mall on top of the boat-launching area, which had now become part of a secret military installation. Also, I was just wearing a swimming suit. I had to work my way through the mall to the docks below. Attempts to engage the clerks in conversation to get directions were fruitless; eventually I understood that they were either sworn to secrecy about the base, or they were unaware of its existence. The latter seemed likely. I would have insisted on that, since I was, after all, the head of the organization, which was SHADO, and I was Ed Straker. In a swim suit. Without identification.

This is standard stuff, yes; we’ve all had that dream. but two things stuck out:

The ingenious construction of the entertainment complex: it was all designed to funnel traffic in a single direction, and I was traveling in a contrary manner – this gave everything a Poseidon-Adventure feel, with all the
attendant claustrophobia and disorientation. Everyone has their fears –
today I heard Dennis Prager discuss the fear of dying by fire, which I’ve
never had. Same with drowning: que sera sera. But entombment gives me the
cheevers, which might be why dreams that make a withdrawal from the Fear
Bank always include incrementally diminishing spaces.

Many people have public-speaking fears, and I suppose this shows up in
dreams; not me – but I have constant recurring dreams of going on the air
unprepared, and doing shows that aren’t really on the air at all, the audience
having left, the engineers turned off the mikes halfway through. I’m usually
okay with this. It’s almost a relief to know no one’s listening.

Two: the little set-pieces the brain produces are quite remarkable. I was
leaving a restaurant, and behind me was a guy straight out of some early 70s
TV show set in Kojak New York – yellow-brown leisure suit, big black glasses,
greasy hair plastered over a bald head, thin, grinning. He was ribbing his
daughter about that singer she liked: “Your boyfriend, Queen,” he said.

“It’s Prince, dad,” she said, exasperated; they had been through this before.

“Prince, Queen, whatever,” he said.

At this point I realized I had lost all of my dead relatives. The alarm bonged
gently, and Mrs. Gladys Stevens, of Omaha.

It’s at 5:02. As I’ve said before, this is what my alarm clock plays, minus the
conversation. And yes, it will take all my power not to sit down and watch the
entire damn movie tonight. I have to finish Season 6 of the “The Office.”
which I’ve decided is one of my favorite sitcoms ever. It turned into
something quite unlike the original by virtue of its longevity and lighter tone,
and the inability of American comedy to produce the same sort of achingly
painful embarrassment the Brits do so well. At this point the entire conceit of
the “documentary” is nonsense, but it’s become a vernacular all its own.
I was probably watching it all at once a couple of years ago. I know I was listening to Bob & Ray shows about three, four years ago. Started up again, having forgotten almost everything in between. Bob's granddaughter is now on Saturday Night Live, which is heartwarming. Really: it's one thing to make a career in comedy, but to see your son and granddaughter follow in your path is quite remarkable. I never liked Chris Elliot much, but back then I didn't know whose son he was, and now that I understand the connection I still don't care much for him. But it's great that he's him! I should say I don't dislike him; knew him from Letterman, and wondered what the big deal was, then saw him on “Manhunter” and “Abyss” and really wondered what the big deal was.

Hey, here's today's ephemera: early 70s horse-hoof powder tells vacant young things they'll be come-hither swinging trim greatest!
The girl who really swings with life wants to look her greatest all the time. She knows that good looks begin from deep inside. A trim come-hither figure, plenty of vim and vigor, and attractive hands with beautiful nails are beauty basics. Knox Unflavored Gelatine and instant Knox Gelatine Drinks help you achieve beauty from within. Here’s how to use these wonderful products to best advantage as nail-care, diet and energy aids.

Yes, I’m just posting small stuff. I have a stack of magazines two feet high you’ll be seeing next year . . . one page at a time. See you around!
119 RESPONSES TO *i am the ferryman, coo-coo-ka-choo*

**GardenStater** says:
December 8, 2010 at 4:01 pm

Nicely done, hpoulter.

**bgbear** says:
December 8, 2010 at 4:05 pm

Good thing James didn’t mention the dirty knife.

**swschrad** says:
December 8, 2010 at 4:22 pm

@pizza wacks: what, none of you characters make your own pizza? stock up some stuff (you can even use premade crusts or Rhodes dough if you don’t want to make and rise your own) and it’s tasty, hot, quick, and the house smells like a good pizza joint.

delivery is nice if you’re tired or have been stuck in the driving snow on your feet in the middle of nowhere waiting 1-1/2 hours for buses that should have left downtown 3 hours ago.

but eating somewhat close to on-time counts, too.

**metaphizzle** says:
December 8, 2010 at 4:46 pm

“*James’ run-ins with service people are legendary.*”
Not nearly as legendary as the nitpicking that the usual suspects engage in every single time James so much as mentions service people.

**xrayguy** says:
December 8, 2010 at 5:03 pm

Both sides of the coin from the services industry end. I at the end of the last century I worked as a pizza delivery driver. I was very proud of the night I drove a 5 house loop to the far end of our district, getting last one in under the 20 min. goal-winter night, snow covered streets (Lincoln, NE), Sat. night shift.

ON THE OTHER HAND-delivering on a Friday DAY shift during snow/high wind conditions (same VW Rabbit) to idiots who decided since it was a blizzard and schools were closed, LETS ORDER PIZZA-don’t bother to let you know the street was drifted over a block from the house. Moral-order pizza, be realistic about expectations.

**Shah Guido G** says:
December 8, 2010 at 5:14 pm

Some people see their interactions with the deliverymen, cashiers, receptionists, or clerks that they encounter each day as simple cogs in the machine of delivering them services. Such interaction is meaningless and could just as easily be with a machine as with a human being. Others see the people who do such work as actual human beings with emotions, humor, attitudes, pride/ambivalence, etc.
I believe that Mr. Lileks sees these folks as actual human beings, in part because he has done a lot of their jobs. Also, it seems like James thinks that work itself is interesting and an essential part of human existence. I can tell he thinks that doing a job correctly is important.

Anyway, my point is, that he's not nit-picking, he's acknowledging the common humanity that we all share and fighting for its dignity. I applaud that.

As for jeans as a right of passage, it's funny how where you were raised and who raised you shape how you view the world. In Colorado, jeans are worn everywhere by everybody. Every kid in my high school wore Levi's and a t-shirt, rich or poor.

maryjo meyer says:
December 8, 2010 at 5:27 pm

I finally convinced my mother that jeans were essential for popularity. She felt that girls should not wear them unless they wanted trouble. So she bought jeans for me Duck Head Brand with the zipper carefully hidden in one of the pockets. Can you imagine a more nerdy announcement of social failure? But Levi's were forbidden. So I endured Duck Head jeans until I scorched them striking a match on the zipper. They went away and finally I got Levi's with a fly. It was too late for social rehab totally but things did improve. And when I started smoking my trademark was lighting my cigarettes with a kitchen match struck on my front zipper. How we work for noticing. Love your stuff, MJ

John says:
December 8, 2010 at 6:48 pm

Some weeks ago, in this very forum, I wrote very harshly of the Internet in general and the Bleats in particular. So high was my dudgeon, I even added to my website a page on the theme. But of course I settled down, and asked myself: did I overreact? Now I know the answer: no. I, and the critics we've heard from today, got it right. Or to paraphrase Natalie as she herself regretfully failed to: IT'S JUST A PIZZA. Anyway, I did go back and conceal the hyperlink. Search engines can find it and therefore the new page, should a suitably strident and underoccupied blogger look for it, but as a service to whoever the heck visits my site (residents of Tiflis and Lima, last I checked), it is not likely you'll trip over it.

Our host is never strident or underoccupied, which makes some of us wonder why he stays up 'til 1 AM blogging. Well, I myself skimmed what he wrote; maybe that is satisfaction enough. I hope not; I hope the compulsion has a greater justification, though I doubt it. The Internet just ain't fresh; all its carbon is fossil carbon, and to recycle it is to do what nature was going to do anyway. I learn a few things from the Internet, occasionally. Today, for example, I discovered Turkish has a word for “sensitivity.” (Hassasiyet, if you're scoring.) I am sometimes amused by the Bleat, but the online amusement industry has numerous competitors, even ones as lowly as the Turkish language, itself so lowly it actually had to borrow this word from Arabic. Isn't that monstrously funny?

As I said – or brayed – some weeks ago, there is much beyond the Internet, and readers do well to check out the offline amusement industry, a/k/a life. I'm getting ready for my 13th visit to Brazil, and it recently occurred to me that it was years before I learned the Portuguese for “So what?” I never needed to say it, and neither in my experience did any Brazilians, Portuguese, Cape Verdeans, Mozambicans, or Santomeans (or that one halitotic Angolan, either).
On the Internet, though, you’re saying it constantly.

**Regina** says:
December 8, 2010 at 7:43 pm

Jeans are a milestone? Must be a Midwest thing. Isn’t James’ daughter 10 yrs. old? Think I wore jeans when I was two. Definitely had denim overalls. Is this a normal thing? Seems stifling to me...

**CaliforniaJeff** says:
December 8, 2010 at 8:33 pm

It's much ado about nothing: the pizza parlor must meet the expectation to deliver a reasonably hot product. They must take weather into their scheduling consideration just as much as airlines do.

(I'm not saying pizza delivery is life-and-death; I'm expressing a simple business principle).

There exist electrically-heated thermal bags that hold the pies, powered by the cigarette lighter receptacle and/or a battery. If you run a pizza parlor in a place that gets snow, you're way, way behind the state of the art if you can't do something simple like that to ensure your product is still an edible pizza at the end of its journey.


**Doug Sundseth** says:
December 8, 2010 at 8:51 pm

I've delivered pizza in Laramie, Wyoming in the dead of winter, on icy streets, when the temperature was below -20F. If the pizza is cold when it arrives, the customer deserves compensation. And when I managed a pizza store, I'd have cheerfully given it to him.

As a restaurant manager, if you're smart, you want your customers to tell you when the service or product doesn't meet their expectations. Then you have a chance to fix the problem before you go out of business and perhaps even keep the business of a dissatisfied customer.

It sounds to me like the store manager here did exactly the right thing, and without complaint. A free meal is a cheap price to pay for feedback and customer loyalty.

**swschrad** says:
December 8, 2010 at 8:52 pm

at the end of the day, a screed is just a screed.

but a pizza... that's a meal.

it is rumored by multiple media releases and promos that this Sunday, it will be possible to see Tabloid Kate rained on and tossing bush food and throwing a fit. while the kids are doing OK.

I've always been of the opinion that first you have to take a bite, and **THEN** you can throw a fit and toss food.

and if it's cold and you have something to warm it up so you're happier with it, go for it, man.
and if the choice is last week's fossilized porridge, or whatever the
hell that kerappe is way at the back of the fridge behind the furry
fruit, or something fresh but congealed, take a chance on the food
product substitute younger than you are.

and look where all these foreign ideas got me.

on the wacky.

fizzbin says:
December 8, 2010 at 9:13 pm

Christ on a crutch!!! The pizza was not only cold, it did not have the
extra sauce jim-jimmy-james PAID for. Does that not make a
difference? Well???

Piffle, I loves me some left over pizza which spent the night in the
frig. Ahhhh, cold pizza and hot, black coffee!!!! Why, the very gods
themselves weep bitter tears because on Mount Olympus there IS no
pizza 😎

And to all the sissy boys and girls who complain about the free Bleat
content – potsomnia dupa.

And now…..TOGA, TOGA, TOGA

Jeff says:
December 8, 2010 at 9:51 pm

Neon signs in Chicago — by way of a Roger Ebert link, bless him:

http://achicagosojourn.blogspot.com/2010/11/neons-i-have-
known.html

browniejr says:
December 8, 2010 at 11:14 pm

@pizza- bah. As an unrepentant capitalist, I believe customers
should get what they pay for. The successful capitalist pizza
pursuers will deliver hot, tasty slices regardless of the weather.
The failures will constantly have excuses and will be out of business
in 3 months.

Hot UFO women: One became the mother of the latest Sherlock…

Ben says:
December 9, 2010 at 11:43 am

I can't believe how touchy this pizza topic has gotten... Bottom line
is, this is how business is done – pizzas will be cold on bad-weather
days, and the pizza shop will be happy to comp them a free pie or
two for later. A friend of mine managed a pizza place for many
years, and one thing he told me always stuck with me: “A free pizza
costs us a lot less than a lost customer.” He would never hesitate to
offer anybody a free pizza if they expressed the slightest
discontentment. The ingredients cost almost nothing, and a free
pizza guarantees that the customer will return.

metaphizzle says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:50 pm

“Or to paraphrase Natalie as she herself regrettably failed to: IT’S
JUST A PIZZA.

IT’S JUST A JUSTIFIABLY DISSATISFIED CUSTOMER MAKING HIS DISSATISFACTION KNOWN SUCH THAT THE RESTAURANT CAN AVOID REPEATING THE MISTAKE IN THE FUTURE AND CONTINUE DOING BUSINESS WITH THE CUSTOMER.

IT’S JUST THE FREE MARKET CORRECTING ITSELF.

“I am sometimes amused by the Bleat, but the online amusement industry has numerous competitors.”

If the Bleat doesn’t tickle your fancy, then you’re free to go read up on some language that does. But it strikes me as counter-productive to say so here, and just plain rude to cast aspersions on those us who do enjoy James’ writing. There must be trillions of blogs out there that don’t interest me, and my reaction is to just ignore them, rather than popping in to tell the authors and readers to get a life. You, on the other hand, felt the need to do exactly that, and I can’t help but wonder why.

After all, IT’S JUST THE INTERNET.

“As I said – or brayed – some weeks ago, there is much beyond the Internet, and readers do well to check out the offline amusement industry, a/k/a life.”

“Life! Don’t talk to me about life.”

More seriously, you’re making assumptions about the lives of bleatniks: people who you know nothing about, beyond what they post here. Are you familiar with the concept of surfing the internet during lunch break? Actually, I suppose researching aphids full-time for my Master's thesis doesn't count as living, either? Oh, woe is me.

ssmart says:
December 10, 2010 at 9:46 pm

In all the hub-bub about pizza's, I see no one has referenced the John Lennon tye-in to the title of the piece.

Seattle Dave says:
December 12, 2010 at 2:52 am

Honestly, I'm amazed at how many of us seem to be overlooking the fact that a customer who calls a pizza delivery place and orders a hot pizza, delivered, has every right to expect to receive the same. If the pizza place cannot fulfill that request, they should say so. I do recall occasions (snow storms being an example) when I've been told by pizza places that they were not making any more deliveries that evening, which is exactly the right way to handle it. James was right to complain; the manager of the pizza place which didn't meet the customer's reasonable expectation was right to apologize and to offer compensation. That's how business works.
I am the ferryman, coo-coo-ka-choo | The Bleat.

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Bleat is disappointing today

... and probably not worth the wait; it's a computer gift-guide for anal-retentive types. Short version of today: awesome! Cold. Teeth-cracking cold. Hit the mall for shopping, but turned all that good yeasty material into the column. Spent most of the night writing, which short-shrifted the Bleat – and when I finished what I intended to post, I realized I could either stay up until 1 AM adding all the links, or stand down for the night and promise to post tomorrow. Which I won’t, because things will come up. Argh.

Consolation promise: Diner tomorrow.

Hey, here’s my favorite Bond theme ever. I’m willing to entertain contenders, but only Goldfinger comes close, and it’s all brassy Bassey without the expansive melancholy of this number.
But that's just me. What's your favorite movie theme?

–

Okay, now that I've put something out there with a general interest theme, here's the dorken-stuff.

I got some interesting feedback yesterday about a glancing computer program recommendation, and so, what the hell. I'm always on the lookout for small programs that give me the illusion of managing my data, improving my work, making me feel as if I'm in control of the vast amount of data I have. In the end you're on your own, because anything that helps you "organize" stuff requires you to make an effort. But! If you have a mild form of obsessive-compulsive disorder – and I think computers actually allow such tendencies to bloom, and ennobles them as "organizational strategies" – then there's great pleasure in putting everything where it should be.

Especially if the program has a nice interface, because that flatters your conception of yourself as someone who believes aesthetics are not only important, but make you a slightly better person than someone who uses a hideous program with bad fonts whose powerful tools are expressed in an elegant design. Well, maybe that program automatically backs up everything, but gawd, that bevel on the splash screen is SO 2002.

That said:

**Handbrake** is good for ripping DVDs; it's ugly, but it does the job without tweaking, and tweaking is yours to be had if you wish. However, the icon is ugly, and the name inscrutable. For ordinary video conversion, **Permute** is dead-simple and quiet and unobtrusive.

Backing up: I have tried nearly every program available. I use **Carbon Copy** for cloning boot drives, which I only do monthly. But – but you're insane! you say. INSANE! No: I have an ongoing incremental backup via Mac's built-in...
Time Machine, which gives me one copy. I have backups scheduled via Chronosync that distribute data through the hard drive on my machine. It's simple – drop the folders in the window, set the time you want them to sync, and forget about it. The program turns itself on at 4 AM and syncs your data. Once a month I run deep backups on a series of external drives, and that requires manual attention, but big whoop.

Clipboard managers: y’know, I don’t find myself constantly juggling myriad clips, pasting them into various programs, wishing there was some system-wide program that would give me hot-key access to an URL I highlighted six days ago. The only thing I want to do is this: drop in pieces of HTML code I use over and over. On my blog at the paper, I write everything in HTML, and hence tire of adding paragraph breaks and blockquote. Typenator lets me drop in the relevant code with a few pre-defined macros. Every other clipboard manager I’ve seen is just a nightmarish example of feature bloat. Stuf, for example, might be up your alley if you’re constantly moving graphics around, but the icon gives me the creeps. That mask. I hate it. Yes, I’m that shallow.

FTP: Maybe there are other programs that do everything Transmit does, but all I know is this: Transmit lets me create little wormholes that sit in the folder, and when I drop something on the wormhole it goes off to my site, and that’s that.

Putting stuff elsewhere: Dropzone. You add destination folders. You drag a file onto the Dock icon, which brings up a grid of destinations. Release. The file goes there, and it no longer exists where it used to be. This is copy without the copy. You don’t end up with two versions of the file.

Dealing with Recent Stuff: we're caught in a ‘twixt-and-between world where things are still thought to exist in folders, but belong to larger organizational schemes based on tags. I'm in the process of tagging everything I have, because I am sick. But what if you just want to see something you were working on recently, and don’t remember where you stored it? For a while I really, really wanted to use Fresh, which has an attractive green bar showing all the things you were working on, but damn: it just takes over your screen. I started working with Blast recently, and it’s much tidier. I’ll probably buy this one, and trash Fresh.

Intra-computer file access: Dropbox. No question. For information that doesn’t need to be opened in a program, Evernote. Both work on your phone, so you’re always connected to key information.

Security: for passwords, there's no argument: 1Password is the best tool for assembling all your passwords, logins, software keys, and so on. As the Marines would say while jogging: Looks good! Mm-hmm! Works good! Mm-hmm! Good for you! Mm-hmm! Good for me! Mm-hmm!

As for encrypting personal data, I’ve used two programs. Exces has a weird icon and I don’t know what it’s doing. Espionage worked well for a while until it didn’t, and it wouldn’t unlock secret folders. Maybe you’re better off
just using Disk Utility to create encrypted password-protected disk images. It's free, and it's built into the Mac OS.

For network security: I used a program with infinite settings that warned about everything. Good for paranoids. At one point I fiddled with the settings and somehow destroyed my access to the internet. Power users will love the customization. I'm content with Sophos and Little Snitch; the latter can be a nag, but it sends up a flare when something wants to talk to some distant strange computer.

There, that's some of it. Add your suggestions, to interfere with the other topic subject. Sorry for the nerdery! Back to normal tomorrow.

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**99 RESPONSES TO bleat is disappointing today**

**Spud** says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:22 pm

If I'm in a mood for a Bond theme song, I'll just take out my Jonny Quest DVD. My favorite movie theme music would be Tangerine Dream's work on “Thief” (James Caan, Willie Nelson). The “Blade Runner” music with Vangelis is good too.

I'll also say “here here” to the EverNote program. I should use it more, but I'm just too lazy. It's a good one to get/download for the kids in school as they utilize the computers/internet, as it can help them organize their work and get into good habits.

**swschrad** says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:31 pm

password programs: used one avidly at work until the hard disk died. whoa, what are all my passwords?

I have over 200 that I need randomly, daily, you see.

plus everything for my home life.

so we're back to paper for them in both places. at home, they're indexed, in case I get hit by a bus and wifey has to sort things out.

any really good passwords, somebody's already hoovered them up and they're likely on a server out of siberia anyway. ask on 'facedbook and somebody will give it to me 😛

**madCanada** says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:31 pm

Okay. Bond. Carly Simon. “Nobody Does It Better.” In my mind, the definitive breezy sexy 70's movie theme. Saw it as a wee lad in a jam-packed 2500-seat theatre on a colossal screen — the way movies, especially Bond ficks, were meant to be seen.
Greg Thorne says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:32 pm

James-
Good list. I'm going to have to check out many of them. Here's a couple of suggestions for you:

Coda:
http://www.panic.com/coda/
Really designed for developers, but it's simple enough to scale to whatever you need it for. Combines HTML/CSS editing with FTP, so you never have to leave the program. You can define 'clips', that can be dragged into your document, or you can access them by typing the keyword you defined, then hitting 'tab'.

Knox:
http://agilewebsolutions.com/knox
Create password-protected, encrypted volumes, then access them by mounting them just like a regular disk volume. Copy/move files, then close the volume when you want it to go away. Doesn't get much easier. Oh, and it has a cute briefcase icon, so you're safe there.

Charles D. Shell says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:48 pm

I'm probably biased since I really dug “The Man With the Golden Gun” as a kid, but that theme still gets me. But there have been a LOT of great JB themes, so it's hard to pick.

If you're talking just movie songs/themes in general, I'd have a tough time picking a favorite. “The Untouchables” had some great iconic scores. “The Incredibles” had some amazing stuff, too. (That's two 'bles' in a row.)

A couple off the top of my head is the Main Theme in “Blade 2” by Marco Beltrami & Danny Saber. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW2Ne1QVr2o

Another might be the Raiders of the Lost Ark theme.

But these are all instrumentals. A movie vocal? Hmm . . .

Elton John's “Pinball Wizard” cover in “Tommy” was always a showstopper with me. Don't know if that counts as a 'theme', though.

Sigivald says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:49 pm

What's your favorite movie theme?

Buckaroo Banzai. Specifically the end credits theme.

Bruno Strozek says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:52 pm

“You Only Live Twice” is one of the top 5 Bond movies of all time. After listening to the theme I have to check NetFlix and see if the stream the video!

metaphizzle says:
December 9, 2010 at 12:55 pm
Michael Giacchino: *The Incredibles*.

**bgbear says:**
December 9, 2010 at 1:02 pm

When I was little I like the “Georgie Girl” song and had a crush on Lynn Redgrave. Also the “Cat Ballou” song with crush on Hanoi Jane.

*I never had a latency period*

**LS says:**
December 9, 2010 at 1:14 pm

Anything by John Barry is good. Check out “Beat Girl,” “The Knack... and How to Get It,” and “The Ipcress File.” Also, anything by Mancini or Jerry Goldsmith.

**hpoulter says:**
December 9, 2010 at 1:15 pm

@metaphizzle:


[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_hdmt4vpBo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_hdmt4vpBo)

I really like Joe Hisaishi’s music for “Spirited Away” and other Miyazaki films, as well. It’s wonderfully emotional music, and really suited to those films.

**Charlie Young says:**
December 9, 2010 at 1:18 pm

Hey, you forgot Zumodrive for getting your music collection in the cloud. You mentioned it about a month or two ago. I tried it and found it to be acceptable. 1st 2 gigs are free (after jumping through some hoops) and they start to tack on monthly fees for 10 gigs and up. Not a bad service, though.

**Charlie Young says:**
December 9, 2010 at 1:23 pm

Zumodrive

**Stewart says:**
December 9, 2010 at 1:32 pm

“You Only Live Twice” is my 3rd fav Bond, after “We have All The Time In The World” from OHMSS and “The Spy Who Loved Me”- especially the lovely synth ending in the film which is strangely missing from the album. Overall fav is “Where Eagles Dare” followed by “The Magnificent Seven”; honorable mention to Keith Emerson’s “Nighthawks” sadly not available in soundtrack. Whenever I read a lament of the lack of symphonic music in the 20th Century, I have to wonder if they never went to the movies; the great symphonic of the last century was almost all done for film.
If we're talking Bond themes, I vote for *Casino Royale*. *No, not that* one; the original one, by Herb Alpert. It's the most insanely happy, goofy joyous instrumental ever recorded.

If you want to go really lateral, how about Mahler's 5th Symphony? The whole thing is a soundtrack in search of a movie.

Hello? Gone With The Wind, anybody?

My favorite soundtrack is Local Hero by Mark Knopfler. Also, it's my favorite movie.

Anything by the Beau Hunks. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25gcs4yullk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25gcs4yullk)

I am a Beau Hunks fan as well, but hard to call that movie themes in this context.

You only live Twice is indeed the best Bond theme with vocals, but the absolute best is On Her Majesty's Secret Service.

Oops, favorite film music, not even close: Ennio Morricone. Scored a number of films but the best are Sergio Leone's: Once upon a time in the West and Good, Bad and the Ugly.

I posted earlier, but it was awaiting “moderation” indefinitely, so here goes again.

Godfather, Jaws, West Side Story off the top of my head.

Best movie music soundtrack of all time (IMO) is from the 1991 Alan Parker film, “The Commitments”. It's also one of my favorite movies with a ton of quotable quotes (“Do you not get it, lads? The Irish are the blacks of Europe. And Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland. And the Northside Dubliners are the blacks of Dublin. So say it once, say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud.”) Brilliant Irish comedy! The music is so great. This quote from the movie is an apt description of it's soundtrack:

“…Sure there's a lot of different music you can get off on but soul is more than that. It takes you somewhere else. It grabs you by the
balls and lifts you above the shite.”

Lily says:
December 9, 2010 at 3:30 pm
I love the music for the Lord of the Rings movies – more than the actual movies themselves. But I am not much of a movie music fan. Or movie fan. Or even music fan. I prefer books. In a quiet library. With tea.

swschrad says:
December 9, 2010 at 3:30 pm
Gone with the Wind?
frankly, my communicant, I don’t give a damn.
best, great crane shot. the rest is IMPHO Harlequin tripe.

RexV says:
December 9, 2010 at 3:46 pm
Live and Let Die, for me, ranks about fourth on the Bond film themes. Got a new appreciation for it a few weeks ago when The Polyphonic Spree played it to close out a show….wow!

hpoulter says:
December 9, 2010 at 3:50 pm
It's not my top choice, but I would have expected some votes for “Lawrence of Arabia”. It's certainly a theme-y theme.

John Robinson says:
December 9, 2010 at 3:58 pm
Best soundtrack evah? I give you Manos, the Hands of Fate. (Yes, I kid, I kid…)

shesnailie says:
December 9, 2010 at 4:23 pm
_@_v – i actually found torgo's theme from manos on mp3
http://home.roadrunner.com/~dasimperator/torgos_theme.mp3

Cory says:
December 9, 2010 at 4:32 pm
Single song from a movie, not the movie’s “theme” song altho in reality it is – hard to argue the greatest ever is not that little girl with the dog singing Arlen

madCanada says:
December 9, 2010 at 4:33 pm
Chaplin, “Limelight.”
Zac K says:
December 9, 2010 at 4:40 pm

I don’t know why, but the main theme from The Rocketeer has always stuck with me. Everyone I know seems to hate it, but I saw it when I was just a wee lad; I didn’t know better. I love the movie anyway.

Besides, it was by Mr. James Horner.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvBLFqqqS50

xrayguy says:
December 9, 2010 at 4:44 pm

Pick one? Waddaya stoopid? Closest I can come is John Williams theme to Anything- even “1941”, yeah all of it, just makes all my hair stand up witha thrill.
(Trumpet voluntary from “Rocky”)

bgbear says:
December 9, 2010 at 5:14 pm

Ballad of the Green Berets?

swschrad says:
December 9, 2010 at 6:05 pm

I think for the randy hell of it, I will enter “Blame Canada” as best movie song, and see how many folks gag 😊

patriot says:
December 9, 2010 at 6:13 pm

Goldfinger is also my favorite Bond theme song. Shirly Bassey does it very well. Strange but good. By far the best song that I’ve heard her sing.

Pencilpal says:
December 9, 2010 at 6:15 pm

Quirky, but sticks in my mind – one man, one zither, theme from The Third Man. Jaunty but a little paranoid, kinda like the setting for the movie.

Ross Adler says:
December 9, 2010 at 6:23 pm

For me, a tie from the ’80s. The main theme from “The Right Stuff,” full of optimism and exhaltation. And from “Amadeus” just about anything, I suppose, but especially the closing credits music, the 2nd movement from (I think) the 20th piano concerto, full of emotion of quite a different order. Both superb.

Bill Peschel says:
December 9, 2010 at 6:28 pm

On the right side of your page, under “So You Said,” I saw this:

* Ross Adler on Bleat is disappointing today
* Pencilpal on Bleat is disappointing today
* swschrad on Bleat is disappointing today
* bgbear on Bleat is disappointing today
* xrayguy on Bleat is disappointing today

I felt bad about those guys until I realized what you titled today's post. This weapon could be used for good or evil, James.

swschrad says:
December 9, 2010 at 7:50 pm

@Bill Peschel: actually, that's the first use of the new algorithm, “Write What I'm Thinking.”

apparently has a predictive feature, too.

I wish it had a lottery number feature, because it's right on so far 😊

madCanada says:
December 9, 2010 at 8:13 pm

Antonio Carlos Jobim's score for “Black Orpheus...”

and Mikis Theodorakis' score for “Zorba the Greek.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeNsr_nQEfE

Crid [CridComment at gmail] says:
December 9, 2010 at 9:38 pm

Excellent choice, Mr. Lileks. There is no second prize. And if there were, it would be to the sister theme from Mr. Barry, “Midnight Cowboy.”

Seriously, after all these years, posts like that make you a favorite blogger.

browniejr says:
December 9, 2010 at 10:17 pm

@shesnailie: Torgo's Theme suggests a solution to Mr. Lilek's cold pizza delivery problem:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__0C1lxp1Q4


Movies: For setting the mood, ANYTHING by Bernard Herrmann (Psycho, North by Northwest, Citizen Kane, The Day the Earth Stood Still, etc., etc.!) (1)

Bond Theme: I gotta agree with Lileks- YOLT, by a mile.

Mrs.ME says:
December 9, 2010 at 10:52 pm

LOVE the soundtrack to 'The Mission' by Ennio Morricone. Especially love Gabriel's Oboe. Also love most anything by Dave Grusin. The first movie I ever saw was 'The Music Man' when I was 3. My mom said I sat spellbound for the entire couple hours. We had the LP and I listened to it hour after hour when I was young.
Another favorite movie soundtrack for me was West Side Story during my teen years.

**Bob Lipton** says:
December 9, 2010 at 11:11 pm

Oh, if you're going to go for tv themes, it's Lalo Schifrin's theme from MISSION IMPOSSIBLE.

BOB

**Richard Heft** says:
December 10, 2010 at 2:48 am

Opening credits to THE 49TH PARALLEL by Ralph Vaughn Williams.

**camillofan** says:
December 10, 2010 at 8:11 am

Commenting on a day-old post because (in my admittedly quick read-through) I didn't see mention of any of Randy Newman's scores and wanted to remedy that. Could name several, but “The Natural” has always been a favorite.

I did see others name Elmer Bernstein; here's another vote for “To Kill a Mockingbird.” (Was there *anything* about that movie that wasn't just right?)

Song from a film? “The Windmills of Your Mind,” by Michel Legrand & the Bergmans, from “The Thomas Crown Affair” (original version, of course). And it wasn't the theme song, but Mr. Newman's “When She Loved Me” from “Toy Story II” is exquisite.

**chrisbcritter** says:
December 10, 2010 at 12:09 pm

I hate coming late to the party…
I always loved the theme from Swing Shift, “Someone Waits for You” sung by Carly Simon – would have been a big hit 40 years earlier.
For instrumentals, John Williams' opening theme from Midway which was played to footage of the Doolittle raid from Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo, climaxing with bombs exploding in Sensurround.
Bond theme: “Thunderball” – Only Tom Jones could have pulled it off, although I wish Elvis could have taken a crack at it.
Fake Bond theme: “The Man For Me” by Khristy from Operation Kid Brother. As close as we'll probably get to Morricone scoring a Bond film, sadly…

**Chris** says:
December 10, 2010 at 2:54 pm

My vote for best movie theme would have to be Ben Hur hands down. The whole score blows me away especially the “love” theme.

**John** says:
December 10, 2010 at 4:14 pm

Great thread. I love the theme for Year of Living Dangerously by Vangelis [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsBOxDM_Vek](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsBOxDM_Vek)
and the end credits for A Series of Unfortunate Events
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsZ75J8_jNE&feature=related

Paul in NJ says:
December 12, 2010 at 11:37 pm

Some very interesting software suggestions – and, wadda ya know, some of them even have Windows versions! Will be checking ’em out.

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Haven't done the Christmas letter yet. Cards aren't out. This is a problem. I balk every year at writing the letter, because, well, what we've been doing is not exactly a closely-guarded secret. If anyone's interested, there's a blog somewhere that says something about it. The exact location and name escapes me at the moment, but you probably know what I mean. I'll get the cards on Saturday at Target, and this year I will not make the stupid assumption that the machines can read Mac-formatted anything. Thanks, Kodak! Yes, I know, I should do them ONLINE, like everything else; did that one year, and they were expensive and lousy and took longer. I could print them off myself, but the ink for my machine contains shaved dodo beak, which is in short supply and hence very expensive. I look through the cards my mother saved, and they're all standard-issue store-bought stuff with a scrawl and maybe a photo of the family – buzzcut kids, slick-back dad, smiling mom, all sitting on a nubby-fabric sofa with three ceramic geese on the wall behind them. That was enough. Now you're obligated to use a picture of everyone in a tropical locale with expressions found in the last seconds of a dance routine on “Glee.”

Had some scanning time today, and chewed through the highlights of a 1928 magazine for farmers. Most of the big ads are for food or stoves; there
are innumerable tiny ads for chicks or chick heaters or medicines that solve the problem of chick diarrhea. You know what happens when chicks get the runs? They die. The advertised product promised to have them up on their adorable little claws and cheeping with glee in 24 hours. This ad promised that a salesman might actually deliver goods to your door every other month — Wonder! They are ceaseless!

The building intrigued me. It's a standard commercial / warehouse structure for the era, but you'd be surprised how many of them are still around. They're more likely to empty out and stand abandoned in sad cracked-pavement neighborhoods than be knocked down for redevelopment, and if they hang around long enough they're turned into inner-city office buildings where people sit around amoeba-shaped tables that don't suggest the existence of a hierarchy, and discuss an online business that makes no money but has 12 million users. Well:
It's not only still there, the company is still there. I like that. Everything else in the book is gone except for cigarettes and fridges.

**New Diner today!** I believe I'm good with iTunes, too. If you go [here](http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8448), you'll see a little button that says Subscribe. Otherwise you can download by right-clicking on this old link, right here. Or listen in your browser with an ordinary click. It's part two of “601,” which of course is based entirely on “The Andromeda Strain.” I'm still keeping to my promise of weekly Diners for 2011, and these end-o'-the-year installments are a way of getting back into the groove. The Diner site is back, by the way, and I recommend the right-click / download procedure for all the archived eps; for some reason not all play in a new window. Why, I don't know. One of those “here's a problem with a site that has a hundred quarrelsome elements” situations. Sigh.

Friday is the annual “Fun Run” at my daughter's school. Two words I do not naturally combine. I don't like to run; it's tiresome. I prefer to walk, briskly, which looks dorky – but I like to think it gives me an air of Industry and Purpose, as opposed to looking like the Mayor of Munchkinland trying to leave the scene of a crime without attracting attention. But we have to set good examples, so I'll show up at the school with a smile and some sneakers, and we will run for 40 minutes. It goes quickly enough. Then it's off to the office to write a column, then pick her up from school, then piano, then . . .

Well, you know. That round thing with the pureed tomatoes and the cheese.
Let's not start that again.

It's supposed to be a snowy weekend, though – and I say fine. Fine, I say! Let that full-throated unqualified praise ring off the hills. FINE! It's December; I begrudge no flake, argue with no blizzard, dispute no storm. The more the better. A deep December is good for the Christmas mood, and I actually find myself whistling “It's Beginning To Look a Lot Like Christmas” when I walk around. It had better, of course; It's only a few weeks away. I like the song, more or less, but it suggests that Christmas is one of those things that gradually appears in various manifestations, when of course it arrives all at once after Thanksgiving. I do like the idea of Christmas sneaking up on you, though. It never does. If you're preoccupied with other things all the Christmasy details are annoying – which is why it's good sometimes to go to the mall in the afternoon.

I did this for a column, which is here. Went back to the Japanese store to get something I told my daughter was a ridiculous waste of money. Wandered around, soaking up Details; went to a Fossil store, which stopped carrying anything I wanted years ago. But the graphics are good. They had interesting bags into which one might toss an iPod and strut off thinking “my battered leather goods somehow communicate the authenticity of genuine satchels used in World War Two,” but A) they had no prices, which is never a good sign, and B) they looked heavy. (Also, this one. Eighty-eight bucks. Alas, no.) I don't wear watches anymore; like many people, my cellphone is my watch. Less convenient – really, we're back to the age of taking out a timepiece and looking at it? Why not attach the phone to a fob, a chain that goes across your oyster-stuffed belly?

The need for a backpack is ancient and engrained, and it's taking me a long time to shake it. In college my backpack would contain everything I needed if I was stuck in a small room for two days – books, magazines, newspapers, a journal, a People's Pen, refills, matches, emergency quarters should there be pinball. Last year when I was getting up early and heading off to be Ted Baxter in the video department, I stocked my bag with every possible thing I might need, from a small tripod to extra memory cards, peanuts, moist towelettes, hand sanitizer, and so on. Never used any of it. But I was a shivering hermit in a loincloth compared to what my wife schleps around. It's one of the things that mystified men: the quantity of things women carry. I goggle sometimes at the quantity of items in my wife's bag, and then I stand abashed when I realize the bag is merely a conveyance for the purse, which itself contains the clutch. It would be like me taping my iPhone to my laptop, tapping the laptop to the Mac Pro, putting the Pro on a wheeled cart and dragging it along wherever I went.

**But I'm rambling.** Enjoy the Diner; enjoy your weekend. See you around.

Oh.

Thanks for the contributions to the list yesterday, and I have to second Hippo's remarks on the “Local Hero” soundtrack. It's one of my favorite
movies, too. When it came out we were still in the trailing wake of a recession, and its gung-ho oil-boom tone seemed odd – what, someone’s doing well out there? Things are expanding? I got the soundtrack before I saw the movie, because it was Knopfler, and I loved – and still love – that forlorn penny-whistle stuff. But the entire soundtrack is magic. So many years later, when I made a video about moving from our house to Jasperwood, I used “Going Home,” the closing / title music, for the soundtrack. Took one last tour around the house with my daughter in one arm and the camera in the other, shot the room where she’d spent the first few months of her life. It was raining. As we drove away she put up her hands on the window of the car, as if to hold the house in memory.

See if you can find the spot where I smash-cut to the house with Jasper standing at the top of the hill in the sunlight of the same damned day, looking over his new domain. Yeah, 2:26.

2:26 is every good day I’ve ever had.

76 RESPONSES TO **friday! now with ancient farm-supply hq photos**

Mark E. Hurling says:

December 10, 2010 at 4:42 pm

Thanks for the answers. Now to answer the respondents:

GardenStater: n/a in my case. I have worn cheap digital watches since the 70’s. No stem to wind.

Kevin: I wear mine on top of the wrist. I’m not sure about Soupy, but
I saw an old Laurel and Hardy bit with the watch on the bottom where one of them aced the other into pouring a drink on themselves by turning their wrist over to read the time when asked.

I discovered that I was anomalous in this respect early in life. In college I wore my watch on my right wrist. The first shift I worked as a cop I changed it over to my left wrist after less than 3 hours on duty. I did this after I raised my wrist to eye level to read the time. Since I am right handed and my weapon was on that side too, well you can see the resource conflict rather readily in times of stress.

Fizzbin, you have any observations about this?

**Wagner von Drupen-Sachs** says:
December 10, 2010 at 4:55 pm

I have to have a watch that ticks. That way I know I have a heart.

Did anyone go to the McNess site and buy some of that Aromatic Compound for the treatment of d***rhea? Looks yum!

**GardenStater** says:
December 10, 2010 at 5:10 pm

@Kevin: “do you have the watch-face on the top of the wrist, or on the underside?”

I recall hearing that soldiers in the field would wear the dial on the inside of the wrist, because otherwise it might reflect sunlight, revealing their position to the enemy.

Could be total BS, but it makes sense to me.

**swschrad** says:
December 10, 2010 at 5:20 pm

I think I'm going to waste some Howling Snowpocalypse time tonight or tomorrow by putting up a fake Christmas letter on my blogspot black hole. well, not that fake, just cockeyed.

not that I'd ever mail it out, mind you, but just once I ought to set one down rather than drop squirming snippets as I go from room to room on my unjustifiable missions.

maybe we could work a contest out of the collective hysteria of the Bleatage.

**Patrick** says:
December 10, 2010 at 5:36 pm

@GardenStater:

I think that's the most common reason found for wearing the wrist watch with the face on the inside of the wrist. Another reason I've found relates to having to shoot a rifle: If the watch face is on the outside of the wrist, you have to turn your arm to check the time, which can cause you to either lose the sight of your target, or accidentally release the trigger.

Nowadays most people, mainly women, do it as a fashion thing. With the face turned in, it looks like a snazzy bracelet.

I also use my cell phone as a pocket watch, since I have a tendency
to find walls with my wrist watch. The face isn't broken, but the glass cover is scratched up enough that it's hard to read it.

My parents and I haven't been all that satisfied with the local options for Food-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named, so we've been trying some recipes. Did a sourdough version a couple of weeks ago. Wasn't all that great. I prefer a softer base than what they like. Also the tomato-flavored base coat was too spicy.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:

December 10, 2010 at 6:11 pm

GardenStater,

I agree with Patrick, and now that I think of it in that Laurel and Hardy bit both of them were in military field uniforms.

As for damaging your watch, that's why I only buy cheap digital ones. The ones with the BIG numbers on them now because otherwise I can't read my watch in the gym when not wearing my bi-focals. I got a really nice watch when I graduated from college from my father. It got broken while putting down an epic jukebox and sawdust floor bar brawl. And that was the end of anything but cheap watches for me.

**Beach Home Decor** says:

December 10, 2010 at 6:17 pm

I am not sure if you noticed, but it really looks like the Rss or atom registration hyperlink isn't working the right way. I tried simply clicking on it earlier but it sent me to a 404. .. hope you appreciate the heads up!

**swschrad** says:

December 10, 2010 at 6:36 pm

Food-that-shall-not-be-named: the Howling Snowpocalypse Recipe.

assuming you are not familiar with items like flour and yeast, get some frozen rhodes bread dough. one roll, one large pizza, thin crust. takes several hours to thaw. you will also need “pizza mix” evil shredded cheese, or mozzarella shreds, about 8 ounces per ‘za. toppings to suit; we use turkey pepperoni and finely diced onions.

you will also need canned sauce. Contadina is fine, small can per ‘za, large can makes two FTSNBNs. there are several others. also get some basil and oregano spices. you might like to add some others.

assuming you are familiar with bread machines or hand-kneading bread mix, do it like a standard loaf of bread or rolls, one batch is two ‘zas.

for excitement, put a merchant-freighter load of basil in your crust. braise it on top (that means “rub it to powder between your palms”) and knead in until evenly dispersed.

if you're a thick-crust poison, have the oven on “warm” while you're doing this. raise the dough if desired with a cloth over it after the oven is turned off again.

in any event, once the dough is kneaded, stretch it out over a slight dusting of corn meal on the ‘za plate or stone, and roll the edges up when it's over covering the pan.

braise basil, oregano, pepper etc. to taste into the raw sauce. to my taste, it's about a 1/2 fresh to 1 tablespoon dried of basil and
oregano, and about 1/2 teaspoon of pepper per pie.
spread at the rate of 4-5 ounces per pie across the crust, apply the
toppings. sprinkle the cheese shreds. 350 for 15 to 20 minutes, you'll
know when the cheese is melted and slightly darkened.

if your ‘za drivers are as snowbound as you are, who needs ‘em?
we generally have enough material for 6 pies minimum on hand,
and fix them 2 at a time. one gets chopped and frozen for lunches,
unless we have company. our usual crust is whole wheat.

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fizzbin says:
December 10, 2010 at 8:35 pm

@Mark
In high school I was a gangly klutz which meant I had to wear my
watch faced inside my left wrist. Otherwise, the watch would catch
ton everything. When I was a copper, I was in the shop for coffee.
I'm standing in the squad room taking to a hot steno (a purely
platonic relationship I assure you [wink-wink, nudge-nudge]) when
the jokester Sgt. yells “what time is it”. Naturally, being Mr Smooth, I
quickly turned my left hand and coffee cup in order to be the first
to brown nose said Sgt. Of course, coffee flies allll over the floor.
Sgt, steno hottie and squadroom crack up while pointing at me
doing the na na n na naaaa. And I got to give up my my P.M. break so
I can mop the floor.

Why me, my friend..why ALWAYS me 😐

Dan says:
December 10, 2010 at 8:57 pm

James, any chance of eliminating Flash from your sites? Just like you
I'm a major Apple user and my iPad is the majority way I access
your site now.

Pitts says:
December 10, 2010 at 10:09 pm

Glad to see that someone else appreciates the finer points of Local
Hero, James. That movie came out during my Freshman year in
college, and the soundtrack was a staple of dorm life. I haven't
heard that tune since I retired my albums a decade and change
back, so I think you've prompted another visit to iTunes for me....

GardenStater says:
December 10, 2010 at 11:16 pm

@swschrad: You NAMED it!!!

Your punishment for naming the Food That Shall Not Be Named will
be Banishment!

And a week's vacation with Al Federber.

Chris M says:
December 10, 2010 at 11:32 pm

Oh James! Your story of your baby girl and a young Jasper plus that
Mark Knopfler song nearly brought me to tears. You truly are the
Maestro of Melancholy. How can 10 years go by so fast? But as my
10yo Amanda said, “Hey dad, at least you can now start all over with the baby.” Thank God for my little girls!

swschrad says:
December 10, 2010 at 11:48 pm

@GardenStater: OK, I got it, punishment is banished for a week. I can live with that.

as for Al … he can stay in a tent, in the back yard, in the 25 below air temps. I've been doing staycations. sorry, Al, bring extra warm socks.

I am fearless. I have the strength of ten men. because my deodorant quit.

swschrad says:
December 10, 2010 at 11:53 pm

spent an hour digging dreck out of my Mac. the phules at Symantec Wallet Extraction discontinued the Snortin' Futilities for my version of MacOS several years ago. but getting rid of that sprawlware was next to impossible.

always had two warning boxes and the quick menu on reboot. there were plenty of ghosts in the machine.

looks like I found and killed 'em all with a trial copy of Smith Micro's Spring Cleaning Mac 10.4. it's not especially intuitive, meaning it's very powerful, meaning you can kill a system massively poking about blindly with a snoot full of gin.

at this point, the machine has suddenly sped up about three times. I might just pay these fine folks and keep it around.

shoeless says:
December 11, 2010 at 2:39 am

Local Hero, Cal and Princess Bride–three of the best soundtracks ever. All Knopfler and all world.

Kerry Potenza says:
December 11, 2010 at 6:43 am

@swschrad – Your recipe directions for homemade ‘za sounds good to me (esp. the cornmeal on the crust), but where's the garlic? No garlic is a dealbreaker for me….bad breath be damned!

Natalie says:
December 11, 2010 at 9:07 am

“but the ink for my machine contains shaved dodo beak”

Like.. no, love. ;op

I have store bought, stock cards this year with our names handwritten.

I'm in that kind of mood this year.
Kev says:
December 11, 2010 at 11:50 am

I don't wear watches anymore; like many people, my cellphone is my watch. Less convenient – really, we're back to the age of taking out a timepiece and looking at it?

This is precisely why I still wear a watch. As a musician who makes a lot of his income from private teaching, my life is often divided up into strict 30-minute increments, and it's much, much easier to glance at the watch to see how much time is left in a lesson that digging into my pocket for the iPhone, pushing the button, etc.

Kev says:
December 11, 2010 at 11:51 am

One more thing – I guess it could be said that I wear a watch to do my small part of supporting the economy of Switzerland, which I've visited and enjoyed immensely. I'm surprised the Swiss haven't started making cell phones yet…

swschrad says:
December 11, 2010 at 8:11 pm

@Kerry Potenza: garlic should be part of “etc. to taste,” I think.

first 8 inches of the Howling Snowpocalypse, before noon… drift in the driveway was over a foot. the half-blower bites 10 inches. I was making slow headway when a contractor with a plow came by, and I spent the best $20 of my life 😊

clearing the way because the night before, as I was making sure we had K1 and charcoal lighter and sale Christmas lights, I called home to make sure wifey didn't need anything. “Nope, we're fine.”

this morning… “uh, I made a mistake. we don't have stuff for the holiday breads for work.”

we got plowed out, pulled all the cars across the street to the park, and son #3 said, “hey, don't want you freaking out or anything, I'm driving.”

event highlights included sliding off the road coming back, on the wrong side of the highway… getting stuck in the middle of an intersection two blocks from home… and enough raw language to make a Chief Petty Officer turn his head.

but hey, I didn't freak out or anything, when it was massively obvious the car was not going anywhere two blocks from home, I pulled my parka hood tight and walked a long, long block to a discount store and back with a car shovel for the son and a bag of cat food for traction.

those Minnesnowtans, they're soft. We North Dakota kids, we take 40 below with the stinging snow blowing UP in stride.

and I slept the whole afternoon 😊

shoeless says:
December 12, 2010 at 12:16 am

It was mentioned here earlier that Local Hero is the Scottish Northern Exposure, and it is, I just re-watched it and it's totally true. But Waking Ned Devine, a classic in its own right, has borrowed
more from Local Hero than N-Ex ever did. And gladly so, they are all three excellent shows.

**GardenStater** says:
December 12, 2010 at 9:14 am

“Mr. Lileks, your pizza delivery is going to be a bit delayed.”

I guess Minneapolis is guaranteed a White Christmas this year, huh?

**Wramblin' Wreck** says:
December 12, 2010 at 11:45 am

@GardenStater
LOL! A flat white Christmas for Minneapolis. First a major Interstate bridge collapses, now the Metrodome. Just ‘cause of a little snow.

I know no one from Minneapolis personally but I gather that Minneapolitans are more used to cold temperatures than major snowstorms. True?

**Wramblin' Wreck** says:
December 12, 2010 at 11:51 am

The Metrodome – God playing with bubble wrap.

(I know, I know. Sorry! I expect to be struck by lightning momentarily.)

**swschrad** says:
December 12, 2010 at 6:16 pm

interesting video on you tube from fox on the snow dumping into the metrodump as the center roof tore.

Howling Snowpocalypse totals: Minneapolis, 17.10 inches. Oakdale, 22 inches. we probably got 17 in the near North Burbs, with hellacious drifts where I didn't want them.

like the south side of my roof. 3 foot drifts common, we probably went over 4 and perhaps up to 4-1/2 feet where the roof for the high deck meets the house. so I got up as far as I could reach, in three shifts, with my Avalanche roof clearer. sigh there is a tear on the edge, and a rip in the center of the snow slide. we'll get out the tape and deal with it when it's not headed freakin' below zero.

had to replace the fling paddles in my half-blower, too. I do keep a spare set. good thing I kept the paddle bolts from the bad auger, because one got flung and needed replacement.

I could use a couple more shafts for the Avalanche, except the hog is a little too heavy to lift after 15-20 minutes with four sections. not your garden-variety roof rake, see here:


as seen on all your better news stations up here, which is where I heard about it in the early ‘oughts.

fifth largest snow in modern records (1860-on) for minneapolis-st. paul, just in case you were thinking the Vile Queens were not snakebit.
That, ladies and gentlemen, was a proper blizzard.

After a few years of false alarms, it's good to get the genuine article, a city-closing storm that smother the streets and steps and sidewalks in a deep cold stratum. You wake up, you look outside, and you know you're not going anywhere today. Hurrah! Homebound! Cider and pancakes and Monopoly!
Except that my wife noted there was a goodbye party for a neighbor up the street, and if we can’t slog a block for a party, we’re hopeless.

Correction: I’m hopeless. You just go right ahead, dear. Not that I had anything against the neighbor – to be absolutely honest, I couldn’t place them, and I’ve seen then maybe twice, three times over the last half-decade. I had a video project to do. But to be honest, I didn’t want to leave the house. It would break the spell, somehow. My wife was different; she took the dog for a walk in the teeth of the storm, which I regarded as the height of folly. He’s old! He can’t make it through the drifts. He’ll crap out and you’ll have to stagger to the house with fifty pounds of canine in your arms, and you’ll fall, and the snow will cover you both! But off they went. After a while I looked outside to see if the pace of the storm had quickened, and noted the condition of the gazebo roof:

Aw. Crap. Well, if you’re wondering, no, I couldn’t get the canvas roof off. It was cinched so tightly it’s a miracle the thing didn’t snap with an audible GOINNNNGGG and shoot off into the sky like a big rubber band shot by a bored Zeus reliving his adolescence. It’s almost a relief to know the gazebo is
trashed. Something to look forward to, come the spring: building Number Four.

A foretaste of something happening across town, perhaps:

As I as examining the disaster I heard the gate creak open. My wife arrived, and Jasper Dog bounded in, snow-flecked and happy, full of vim, barking incoherent demands. For heaven's sake: he'd just spent half an hour ploughing through the snow, romping and stomping. He's going to be 16 next March.

Then wife and child made fudge. With peppermint crumbles. Or rather crumbled pieces of peppermint, but you now what I mean; “crumbles” is now an accepted term for ruined small fragments of a larger item, but only if it's instantly recognized as edible. No one would be interested in “plywood crumbles” but when you say “sausage crumbles” everyone knows what you mean, or fakes it long enough to infer the concept. The fudge was delicious, although we lacked the ingredients to maintain structural integrity. It loosened up and slumped. So now it's Topping.

**Before the storm**, preparations. I went to the store for milk and bread. Well, English muffins. Usually I don't do this, because if you plan ahead you can make it through a protracted period of houseboundedness without running out of supplies. And I could. But were low on milk, and daughter likes an egg on an English muffin, so Friday night I braved the store. It was awful; the fellow who got the last baguette swung it like a broadsword to fight his way to the check-out line. Back, you dogs! Back! But it made me wonder: perhaps it's possible that blizzards are summoned by an imbalance in the quantity of milk, bread, and Charmin. When enough people run low, some strange physical relationship between the three either produces storms, or attracts them from North Dakota. By the time we redress the balance in the Force, it's too late. Just a theory, yes – but when was the last time we had a huge blizzard right after a huge blizzard? Nobel science-prize committee, I think.
you have my address.

Earlier in the day, I did the “Fun Run” with daughter, and pretty much embarrassed her as much as possible. How? By singing along with “YMCA,” by jumping up to hit the big swinging ball like the other dads were doing, and by doing fist-punches to the rhythm of the opening bars of “Eye of the Tiger.” Also just by existing. Also by threatening – just threatening, mind you – to run like a chicken, with hands tucked in armpits to simulate wings. These are all unacceptable and cause great distress. This I know, which is why I did them, but for no more than 2 or 3 seconds; I did not persist, and did not repeat forbidden moves. It’s all part of a lesson, though: are you paying attention to what other dads are doing? Do you care? Do you judge your peers because their dads are walking around looking like they just got a summons from the IRS? Hmmm? No. Now, I know these are sensitive years, and I don’t go out of my way to be WIERD or a PERSON WITH PROBLEMS in front of her. But if we can learn somehow to ameliorate the mortification, then the teen years will be easier.

Who am I kidding.

Afterwards my knee hurt – it started pinging and panging the last three minutes, and was a bright sparkly ball of pain when I was done. Hurt the rest of the day. I limped. But I could still operate the pedals on an automobile, alas, which led to me sitting by the side of the road on the way home, waiting for the nice policeman to run my license. Not for speeding, but for not moving over when he was on the shoulder. I wrote a Strib column about this, so I’m not going to repeat myself – suffice to say that I remembered everything people do on COPS, and I did the opposite. Radio off, hands on the wheel at 10 and 2, respond to commands, argue not. Got a warning, and made it home in time to meet the bus.

Since I’ve been showing you the same view from the front porch over the course of the seasons, here’s the view the day after the snow stopped:
... and the backyard.
It's Christmas all over the place.

Tonight the dog wanted to go outside six times. He can't stay away. He must be part Husky; the snow speaks to him, somehow. But once outside he gets cold, and forgets what drove him out in the first place. BARK BARK BARK. Back inside. Ten minutes later, the paw at the door, the look, the question through the nose: please? And back he goes. When I tried to get him back inside he got into that strange authority loop to which dogs are prone: I don't know why I'm challenging you, but I am, so to hell with you. He leaped back and sideways and did some actual bounding until he regained his senses and climbed up the stairs. Maybe Dog Heaven is snowy. We wouldn't think of that. We don't have fur.

More later; see you around.
72 RESPONSES TO *snowbound.*

**swschrad** says:  
December 13, 2010 at 1:04 pm

@bgbear: that's the function of pay lanes, such as the MNpass. our genius engineers have apparently decided to devote scarce dollars to pay lanes instead of taxpayer lanes.

this will leave Our Genial Host out in the “parking” lane. after all, he won't put the same kind of rfid sticker on his windshield for the car wash. fortunately, he uses electrons instead of michelins for his daily commute.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:  
December 13, 2010 at 1:36 pm

Thanks for the explanation gentlemen, and you are right about the CHP, bgbear. It's true in Oregon also when I got a warning ticket last year on the Great West Coast Road Rally only 15 miles from my destination of Corvallis. Nice trooper too. I did the full yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir, and declined (laughingly) to answer the “How fast do you think you were going?” question at the outset of the encounter. I added that I understood the reason for the question and had used it myself in the past. It got a laugh from him too. It also probably helped that I had an Oregon State Dad and CA license plates.

All that said, those other states should ditch their current law and get the cop away from the margin of traffic even if they might get their feet wet or muddy. Not a well thought out response to a problem, but there's nothing new about that.

**swschrad** says:  
December 13, 2010 at 1:52 pm

@Mark E Hurling: if you have 45 degree or more ditch slopes, as we favored for quite a while in Minnesota and North Dakota, it just ain't gonna work for the cop to approach the passenger side of the car.

holds more snow, don'cha know, then. Sven.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:  
December 13, 2010 at 2:05 pm

AH! I suppose my jaundiced view of this results from not having been a deputy sheriff with rural roads to contend with. A good point. Thanks for clarifying this for me.

**bgbear** says:  
December 13, 2010 at 2:19 pm

Shortly after an CHP officer was killed in Santa Clara Co. by an inattentive driver, I remember seeing an officer writing out a ticket while precariously balanced on the sloped road side.

Tough job, those guys have my respect even when I am the one pulled over (hey, only three times in 30 years of driving).
Shah Guido G says:
December 13, 2010 at 2:41 pm

Moishe3rd, blessings to those young ones. And yes, life is beautiful all the time.

James' description of his visit to the store reminded me of a time my family was at a home improvement mega-store. We were looking at cabinets in the faux-kitchens they have to display such items. My 6-year-old girl and 8-year-old boy picked up fake baguettes from the kitchen counter and commenced a swashbuckling sword fight. Although I put a stop to their hijinks fairly quickly, that was one of my proudest moments as a parent.

swschrad says:
December 13, 2010 at 2:48 pm

@Shah Guido: could have been worse. much worse. stories of folks testing the home center toilet displays are legion.

and that's a bad outfit to sign up with, that legion, I gotta tell ya.

the wifey has a tale of Son #2 using the removed toilet sitting in the garage for some weeks, until the dumpster finally came. that was back in the previous marriage. that would not be a proudest moment as a parent. but he's very much better now, thanks.

swschrad says:
December 13, 2010 at 2:50 pm

@OGH twits: no Internet outage here, thanks.

oh, wait, that's what I tell customers.

never mind……

fizzbin says:
December 13, 2010 at 3:44 pm

@Moishe3rd.. congratulations. Your son-in-law enjoying a Minnesnowda blizzard proves he's a mench!

As for the annual Gazebo Affair, may I suggest prestressed concrete arches and Lexan glazing with gun ports, all the better to deal with the impending Zombie Apocalypse, dont-cha-know 😂

JamesS says:
December 13, 2010 at 4:08 pm

@Shah Guido G:

Props for the Isaac Asimov reference!

Kerry Potenza says:
December 13, 2010 at 4:41 pm

@Moishe3rd and @Shah Guido, you (inadvertently) made me think of this silly song by Napoleon XIV that I used to hear on Dr. Demento radio show so many years ago:

They're coming to take me away, ho-ho, hee-hee, ha-haaa
To the funny farm. Where life is beautiful all the time
and I'll be happy to see those nice young men in their clean white coats
and they're coming to take me away, ha-haaa!!!!!

Mark E. Hurling says:
December 13, 2010 at 4:57 pm
That song was a top 40 hit played on WLS Music Radio in Chicago in the 60's when I was in high school.

HelloBall says:
December 13, 2010 at 5:24 pm
swschrad — That certainly clarifies why he is referred to as Son #2.

Will says:
December 13, 2010 at 5:50 pm
If you build a permanent gazebo, please hire the guys that did the OIWF. You will, if nothing else, have a gold mine of material to write about.

swschrad says:
December 13, 2010 at 5:57 pm
@HelloBall: uh, no, that's chronology.
the guy will outwork the First Army if all he's got is a shovel and they've got D16 dozers. he doesn't need GPS in his heavy equipment to cut a straight line at the correct angle regardless of terrain, out to infinity if he gets refueled regularly. but he's up on it.
what he can't stand is slackers, being dissed, and being lied to and cheated.
so, yeah, I'd say he turned out well. he'll help on a home or car project in a second, but don't go lazy on him. you've got to keep up

Moishe3rd says:
December 13, 2010 at 7:19 pm
Thank you for all the kind wishes.
And – yes indeed, weather IS the fault of the Jews.
And – yes... I have been replying “Life is beautiful all the time” to the ordinary question: “How are you?” for over 15 years. (Tends to annoy some of my closest friends after a time...)
It is only a select few and far between who have answered me – “And they're coming to take me away... Ha ha...!”

MJBirch says:
December 13, 2010 at 10:09 pm
James is enjoying the cutout filter on Photoshop, I believe...

MJBirch says:
December 13, 2010 at 10:19 pm
Oh, and the gazebo? My humble and unsolicited opinion? Don't build one. Build a mini log cabin instead (almost typed “logo cabin” which would work in this blog, given James's passion for the aesthetics of advertising) or a junior Swiss chalet with a steeply pitched, snow-shedding roof.

Cory says:
December 13, 2010 at 10:19 pm

Mark E. Hurling

That song was a top 40 hit played on WLS Music Radio in Chicago in the 60's when I was in high school.

Just before Superjock came to town. What he could have done with that one in his salad days.

Bob Lipton says:
December 13, 2010 at 11:02 pm

I owned that on the 45. The flip side was the same thing — sung backwards.

Bob

Kev says:
December 14, 2010 at 8:19 am

IIRC the rule is used in Nevada and Idaho which I drive through regularly and it seems like an odd solution too. I believe the rule is to protect the officer, not the public, from getting hit as he walks around stopped vehicles.

Seems to me all that lane changes can be more hazardous. Slowing down can be hazardous to drivers as well.

Agreed. We have a similar law in Texas, and it occurs to me that, while it may make things safer for the one officer stopped on the shoulder, it makes it a lot more dangerous for everyone who has to pass him. Not a very well-thought-out law, if you ask me.

Fred says:
December 25, 2010 at 8:54 am

The whole business of requiring drivers to move over a lane for a stopped police car strikes me as a bit of an overreaction. You never want anyone to get killed but why doesn’t the law apply to anyone who is stopped by the side of the road? Instead it applies to cops, firemen and the like. I know they have to stop by the side of the road more frequently but they also stand out more.

If it’s a cop by the side of the road, if you’re the type of driver who is paying attention then you’re going to slow down or move over whatever the law says and if you’re the type that’s going to hit a someone then you’re not going to move over whatever the law says.

So there’s new law on the books that won’t protect you or me but will cover public “servants”.

← Older Comments
For some reason the tidal inundation of catalogs seems to have abated this year. It might be due to the economy, still mired in the slough of kreptitude; it could be that some companies took a look at the return rate and said “these guys could not care less about our overpriced, instantly forgettable consumer goods,” and struck us from the list. We still get Wireless and Signal, but I have begged my family not to get me a personalized T-shirt with a message on it. The rest of the goods are unappealing or redundant, and I get a slight pang of sadness when I see thick portfolios of public domain radio shows packed onto CDs. A gift for the fellow who’s never heard of archive.org. The basic demographic for the catalogs is Boomer Comfy, and hence the items reassure the target market that they’re still “plugged in” to the deep abiding elements of Western Civ, as evidenced by their passing interest in a wall clock that has a picture of an early Beatles album.

I should talk. Last night I went on a YouTube jag to hoover up all the video performances of an obscure band that made a pop-blip between the waning seconds of 1979 and the bright frightening dawn of 1980. It wasn’t even a band, really – one guy + sidemen, everything perfected in post-production, the sort of thing you couldn’t reproduce on stage. I love those guys: they have one insanely idiosyncratic approach to pop music, turn out something maddeningly catchy, then sink back into the mists. At least this guy – Tony Mansfield – made his mark; he produced “Always Something There to Remind Me” by Naked Eyes, and drenched the track with all his ideas. But that’s another webpage to come in 2011. Point is, the catalogs in ten years will
never have 80s-themed wall clocks or drink coasters or anything else. Commercialized institutional nostalgia dies with the Boomers. After that it's all the remix culture, which is eternally contemporary.

**Overdue:** I'm pleased to announce that I am now contributing to yet another site. This one is – horrors! – rightward leaning, but my content is ecumenical. I'm doing a thrice-weekly feature on Iconic American Imagery, the sort of thing I used to put on Lint. (Which will be up to speed again soon; I've been feeding stuff to the new site.) It's at rightnetwork.com, which is just juicy with orangey goodness. You'll find me on the Voices page – or use this search result. Enjoy!

**And now,** more selfish complaints about a world that refuses to conform to my unyielding standards!

Snowbound: day three. Not because the storm still rages, or the drifts are piled against the roof, though. The company that's supposed to plow my driveway didn't plow my driveway. I know they're busy. It's been rough all around. But it stopped snowing Saturday night, right?

Well, I didn't want to go anywhere yesterday, anyway. Actually, I did; had errands to run, and might have considered eking my way to Target in the car at hands-and-knees pace. But the driveway apron has a couple feet of snow, and the plowing company said they would be here in the evening. You may ask: did someone not come by to snowblow the interminable walk? Yes, they did. Well, heck, why not hire those guys to blow out your driveway? They're the same company. For reasons I do not understand the sidewalk guys are instructed not to handle driveways. That's left for the driveway guys. Union rules, maybe.

In the evening the city plows rumbled past and shoveled a wall of snow at the end of the driveway. Hey, good thing the plowing service didn't come! Now they'll take out the Great Wall that blocks the road. Win win. Except they didn't come. So this morning I shoveled out half of the driveway, putting the snow . . . where? Correct: on the other half of the driveway. I was not in the mood to distribute each bladeful to individual locations. So now the other part I may have to shovel is twice as deep. Breaking down the Great Wall took 25 minutes, which happened to be five minutes for each degree of ambient temperature. (Insult, injury: blizzards are always followed by bone-chilling cold.) The Great Wall was made of enormous chunks of rock-hard snow, of course; the plows blade is like a glacier that scoops up boulders.

Looks like this on the other side of the street. It's like huge chunks of leprous skin sloughed off by an albino giant.
Eventually I got a path wide enough for the Element so my wife could go to work. It looked like this – night shot taken later, obviously.
That's after I'd perfected it. The path was much more clogged this morning. The Element is high enough so it can get through snow, but we're not talking power to blast through a brick wall like a Canyonero. Alas, the speed required to get out must be reduced immediately, or your bumper makes an inappropriate advance to Mr. Tree directly across the street. The trick is to spin the wheel as you exit. I've done it before. I know this car; I know how to handle it in a skid. What I hadn't factored was the narrowness of the road, which was now down to the diameter of Orson Welles' arteries. I shot backwards, threw it in drive, spun the wheels, bounced off the back drift, and lurched into the drift on my side of the street.

The Element was now stuck in two drifts, each on opposite side of the street, perfectly perpendicular to the direction of traffic.

Of course, a car was coming. Down the hill.

But he stopped, slid a bit, then backed up. A neighbor came by to help, but there wasn't much he could do. I just rocked it back and forth until I managed to dislodge from the old ruts and make new ones, and finally I
crabwalked the car down the street and got it turned around. Tossed the keys to my wife and told her to have a great day. She wouldn't. She was up working on a project until 1 AM, and had been awakened at 6:05 by a robocall from the school, informing us there would be no classes.

The dog's happy, though. Here's a shot from yesterday's walk:

![Dog in the snow](https://example.com/dog_in_snow.jpg)

**Just got** another robocall: no school Tuesday, because of extreme cold, and concerns kids may stand outside while buses take longer because of the roads. Another snowbound day, then. Four in a row.

I'd be furious! but I like it. Really. Home is where the dog is. Among other things.

—

Pass it along, if you wish

54 RESPONSES TO snowbound, con’t.

ssmart says:
December 15, 2010 at 11:59 am
I know Joe, I was making a funny.

Joe Broderick says:
December 15, 2010 at 12:11 pm
Oh, sorry. I shoulda known better.

Crid [CridComment at gmail] says:
December 15, 2010 at 3:42 pm
Hey, anybody recognize this? http://tinyurl.com/27vbrgt

Paul in NJ says:
December 16, 2010 at 9:52 pm
ACTually, RightNetwork has a whole better way to find the screeds of Lileks: http://rightnetwork.com/authors/james-lileks
And in chronological order!

← Older Comments

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1: Matchbook Museum
2: Comic Covers
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

ARCHIVES
All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
May 2013
April 2013
March 2013
February 2013
January 2013
December 2012
November 2012
October 2012
September 2012
August 2012

Please install and activate the “Twitter for WordPress” plugin to use this section.
Why a Stork?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

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?
Okay, does hot water boil faster than cold water? Yes, you think – but what about the energy released when cold water is heated, hmmm?

We'll get to this in a second.

The other day I decided I should cull a few old things from the Closet of Mysteries, things that need to be scanned and sorted and posted, perhaps around 2017. Looked in one box. Realized there were a few things on the shelves that I really didn't need. For that matter, not all of the Big Little Books mean anything, in sentimental terms; could probably boil them down to Space Ghost and Matt Mason.

You know how these things start, and how they end:
It's like all my shelves suffered projectile vomiting. But a purge was necessary. I hate to do it, but prune I must for a better tomorrow. Must come to terms with the fact that I will never read some books again, nor will I consult them. I have two books about the construction of particular New York buildings, for example; one is a sober, plodding tale about Worldwide Plaza, a sober plodding SOM structure. The top is nice. The story of the building's construction made for a PBS TV show, which was fascinating. I seem to remember that the construction foreman was Colorful and Italian, the developer stressed and froglike, the architect a quiet intellectual, and the project ill-timed. Hit the market when the market was tanking, but by 2007 it sold for $1.74 billion. In 2009 it sold for $600 million.

The other book was much livelier: it described the construction of 1540 Broadway, which used to be one of my favorites. Title of the book says it all: High Rise: How 1,000 Men and Women Worked Around the Clock for Five Years and Lost $200 Million Building a Skyscraper. Pictures make it look blockier than it seemed in the initial renderings, which knocked me out when I first saw them . . .
...I should scan the cover before I donate the book. Should scan the construction pictures, too. Now it seems blocky with a silly little pinky of a spire, but the colors were unique at the time.

Also decided to part with “Apple,” a book about the middle years of the company. It ends as Jobs unveils the iMac, and in the last few pages the author drops the reportorial mask to sum up what he’d learned. This was written in 1998:

> . . . in my opinion, Apple's future remains a limited one over the long term, no matter what (Jobs) does. Indeed, the sheer spectacle of his iMac launch was sad in a way, for it underscored how much had been lost over the years. As much as he tried emulate the excitement the excitement of the first Macintosh launch, this was not a product that was destined to change an industry, as the Mac had done. At best, it stood to breathe more life into a sick and tired company.

That it did; for the first half year they sold one every 15 seconds of every minute of every hour of every day, as the press release put it. The translucent plastic was so influential as a piece of industrial design it ended up on George Foreman grills.

> The real question for Apple is whether it has any real future at all, anymore . . . The odds aren't good that (Jobs) can do more than slow the fall, perhaps giving Apple a few more years before it is either gobbled up by a bigger company or finally runs out of customers."

Digital Daily says:

> The latest domestic sales data from NPD shows Apple on pace to sell between 4.1 million and 4.3 million Macs in the December quarter. Which would make for another record breaker in an ever-lengthening string of them. After all, Apple's U.S. Mac sales are up 20 percent year-over-year for the first two months of the current quarter. And with international sales growing faster than domestic, the company will likely see between 22 percent and 28 percent year-over-year growth.

The author still works for the WSJ but doesn't seem to be covering technology anymore.

Ah well: that was conventional wisdom in 1998, unless you were a True Believer, Facing Forward, Excelsior! (Should have brought Stan Lee back to do the ads.)

I skimmed the book to see whether I'd ever want to read about the Copland OS disaster or the Newton problems, and decided yes, I did. But no! NO! It has to go. It has to make room.
In the end, here's the room:

As for the items that require scanning for the website, the stack is now two feet tall. After that, I burn them. Kidding: back to the antique store. Released into the wild, to reassemble in someone else's collection.

Ordinary day; cold. Snow day again, no school. Three days now until Winter Break, so child is stoked, as we said in the 70s, for a fortnight of doing nothing, aka total ziptitude. (My neologism. Use it as you please.) (I am also the author of Nadaism, a philosophy of protesting the absurdity of action by doing nothing. I don’t follow it myself, but am willing to be the leader of any group that professes it, if the money's good.)

I’ve told my wife: nothing for Christmas. Please, no books. Let me complete the Stuff Management Project and get everything archived before anything else comes into the house. It's not just the books and the flotsam, it's the annual archive of ephemera that weighs me down, and the horrible suspicion that my daughter, upon discovering the hidden store of things I’ve set aside, the little scraps that detail the quotidian elements of her childhood, will strike her as a bunch of junk, and out it goes. I'm projecting, here: I'm
assembling the stuff I wish I’d discovered. It all ties in to the record of her life on the videos and the Bleats, the tangible cross-referenced with the passing mention. Does it matter? I don’t know. She’s into all these things now which will fade and pass in a year, and those will probably hold more meaning – and a small amount of meaning, at that. But: my wife noted the other day that she had constructed in her room her own version of the Closet of Mysteries – all these items, these things, arrayed and assembled to indicate her interests. I find this less an indication of my influence on her than my own inability to outgrow the childish need to collect and display. Maybe. It’s interesting when people see the Closet; there’s a momentary pause to drink it all in, and make sense of it all. The only way it makes any sort of sense is to have each item described, its reason for collection explained . . .

. . . but that’s a 2011 lileks.com project. With video!

**As for the question** posed at the top of the Bleat, well, here comes the science: hot water boils faster! Duh. But the other day we were driving around, discussing her upcoming science project for class, and I remembered an hour of the Diner where I brought up the hot-cold-boiling issue, and it made for an hour of peppery radio. So 13 years later, that one hour resurfaces, and leads to the Project. The terms of assignment dictated that you had to break it down to “Control” and “Experiment,” which drove me nuts: it’s “constant” and “variable.”

DAD THAT’S NOT WHAT IT SAYS.

I know, I know, but, those are the two things it always comes down to, and – oh, ink the poster. It’s bedtime.

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**97 RESPONSES TO stuff management**

**swschrad** says:

> December 15, 2010 at 11:37 am

as far as Stuff management goes… I have delegated the SMD parts bin and the solder vac to develop a methodology and procedure document, create a training schedule while allowing all components and manuals to continue their normal duties, and establish task forces to create order and harmony, while not losing any essential functions or strategic duplications.

frankly, Needs Further Improvement.

I am beginning to think I will need to get a consultant, perhaps a new printer to the shed ‘puter, because management is lost on this Stuff.

**Will** says:

> December 15, 2010 at 11:41 am
The author wasn’t wrong about Apple. Had Apple stayed on the same course, they’d have gone under. What saved the company was the iPod, and then giving up on the “going our own way” architecture and building Intel based PCs.

Also, Jerry Ray must be using a completely different version of Windows 7 than I am.

bgbear says:
December 15, 2010 at 11:43 am

Just thinking that I have been a Mac user for about as long as there have been Macs and I have never owned or even used an iMac. Seems odd now that I think about it. Powermacs or Ibooks is all I have ever had.

Also have two PC netbooks for abuse and a PC desktop for security camera control. Agree with above, tools not religion. Of course I am also the wrong kind of white person.

swschrad says:
December 15, 2010 at 11:44 am

@bgbear: “wrong kind of white person”

son, y’all dont say that at the campfire tonight, heah?

Charlie Young says:
December 15, 2010 at 11:46 am

You know, Joe Sixpack, go buy your PC and have fun with it. It works just fine most of the time. Windows 7 is a vast improvement over most of the previous OS. The machines pretty much work as advertised. The problem is, who are you to judge why someone buys something or another? What difference to your life does it really make? If someone wants to go out and spend more for something and has the means to do it, why can’t they do it for their own satisfaction? What you think and say has no bearing on the situation. And yes, I do buy Mac products and find they have a longer life span, are generally better built, and work well beyond my expectations. They are pretty intuitive devices. AN yes, I do find your comments grating, much to your satisfaction. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas.

GardenStater says:
December 15, 2010 at 11:49 am

Al Federber vs. Joe Sixpack.

frogpuddle says:
December 15, 2010 at 11:58 am

I’m glad that all of these arguments are beneath me!

“Beneath me” meaning over my head.

One of my fears is that someday I will understand the differences argued here well enough to spend time participating in the arguments…

Cheers of the Season!
Frog

**GardenStater** says:  
December 15, 2010 at 12:00 pm

@Ben: “cold water doesn’t boil.”

Reminds me of the perfect answer to the question, “If you could have dinner with any person from history, living or dead, who would it be?”

The answer is, of course, “The living one.”

**bgbear** says:  
December 15, 2010 at 12:11 pm

IIRC you can boil cool water in a chamber with reduced pressure.

**hpoulter** says:  
December 15, 2010 at 12:12 pm

@Al Federber vs. Joe Sixpack.

Not fair to Al, who shows occasionable glimmers of reasonableness. Joe EssPee is more in a class with sometimes commenter “areader”. A reflexively nasty bombthrower.

**Joe Broderick** says:  
December 15, 2010 at 12:19 pm

Oooh, I know a good one–Lileks vs Keillor!

(just kidding)

**Charlie Young** says:  
December 15, 2010 at 12:26 pm

More random thoughts:

1) I use a Mac for most of my computing needs, except at work where I need Quickbooks (the Mac version is an abomination) and specialized digital radiographic software not written for a Mac. I do use Win 7 in Parallels on my Mac for Quicken Home (again, the Mac version makes me scream).

2) Kirk, most definitely. Picard is a wus!

3) The proper form for a scientific publication starts with an abstract. You then need to state your hypothesis, design your experiment, show your materials and methods, display your findings, discuss your findings, then derive some conclusion. Experimental design typically has a control group and an experimental group. In order to make the experiment more valid, you need to isolate out as many variables as possible so you are only testing for one characteristic at a time. The control group holds the tested characteristic at a constant, the experimental group has the characteristic changed to show how the variation affects the subject.

**swschrad** says:  
December 15, 2010 at 12:26 pm

@Joe Broderick: It's been a quiet week in Jasperwood. Walked down
to the Pretty Good Gazebo, stopping to turn on the water feature, Lake Pleaseturnon. …

John Robinson says:
December 15, 2010 at 12:30 pm

@Natalie

Thank you, but it's the writer in me coming out, and since boorish behavior seems to be exponentially rising on teh intertoobz these days, I do what I can to stem it … or at the very least ridicule it.

By the way, for those who don't believe I make my living with words, just click my name. *G*

Charlie Young says:
December 15, 2010 at 12:32 pm

Actually, the abstract can only be written after you have done the bulk of the publication. It actually is written after the rest of the paper has been put together. It just gives a brief synopsis of your experiment and findings.

GardenStater says:
December 15, 2010 at 12:40 pm

@hpoulter: It's true that Al can display a civilized side. It was just the best thing I could come up with at the moment.

Apologies, Al–hpoulter's right. You may be a skunk in the garden party at times, but you're no Joe Sixpack.

raf says:
December 15, 2010 at 12:52 pm

Just to add to the confusion. Perhaps “boiling” means “bubbles forming and rising to the surface.” Then it is at least plausible that with high heat, the lower layer of cold water could get to boiling before the entire potful (thermocline effect?) and generate bubbles beneath the cooler layer which then percolate up. Meanwhile, in the warmer water, no layers would form because the temp differential never becomes great enough.

Then: If a pot of hot water is confined in a freezer, much vapor would enter the low-humidity environment, increasing the thermoconductivity of the air, speeding the cooling even after the water temp had been reduced to “cold,” whatever that meant when the experiment measured the freezing time of “cold” water.

And how did the homing pigeons (well, Gertrude, anyway) in Wild, Wild West find the train, wherever it happened to be?

In other words, in a world with many potential variables, the real fun is in inventing possible explanations, not in debunking them.

Sydney Brillo Duodenum says:
December 15, 2010 at 12:55 pm

Mr. Lileks:

I propose that you auction off your Closet of Shame/Mystery detritus to your loyal readers. I for one would bid aggressively for any one of
your cast off architectural books if it was inscribed by you, for example, with “From My Closet of Mysteries to Yours, Your Buddy, James Lileks.” There’s got to be a market for your stuff. You just have to get past the creepy factor.

MikeH says:
December 15, 2010 at 1:23 pm

Love the old radios. If you need to sell them, or want to get rid of them, please contact me. I collect them, even though my collection is running amok, what my wife sez!!

MikeH says:
December 15, 2010 at 1:23 pm

Yes the space bar on my keyboard is crapping out.

fizzbin says:
December 15, 2010 at 1:32 pm

Why, oh why, would anyone want freeze boiled water???

Lance Lawson v. Mister Tink

OK OK, I’ll go back to playing with my MCM miniature furniture collection😊

metaphizzle says:
December 15, 2010 at 1:34 pm

/the bumblebee story arises from a misunderstanding of scaling – a bee the size of a badger could not fly/

While it is certainly true that bumblebees above or below a certain size wouldn’t work, the story I heard about the origin of “Bumblebees shouldn’t fly!” is that a physicist at a dinner party did some calculations on a napkin and couldn’t make a bumblebee wing generate enough lift for the bumblebee’s weight. As they later found out, the fundamental mistake was treating the bee’s wing as a static airfoil—when they did determine exactly how bees fly, they found a crucial part of the lift comes from tiny vortices generated by the wing’s flapping.

Ah. Wikipedia tells me that the origin of the “Bumblebees shouldn’t fly!” is shrouded in mystery, and notes the physicist-at-a-dinner-party story as one possibility.

DryOwlTacos says:
December 15, 2010 at 1:38 pm

My Windows machines are for work, which is very important to me. My Apple machine (iPad) is for play, which is also very important to me. It’s not a matter of which is better, it’s a matter of what is needed when it is needed. Some of you might use your Macs for work and your Windows to play WoW, and that’s cool, too.

Kirk v. Picard? Why isn’t Janeway ever included in the argument? She could take either of them, and I do mean it both ways.😊
DryOwlTacos says:
December 15, 2010 at 1:42 pm

And as far as stuff collection is concerned, do your heirs a favor and cash it out before you do. Spoken by one who just disposed of an estate composed mostly of “sentimental value.”

swschrad says:
December 15, 2010 at 1:46 pm

@Mike H: I hope the old Bakelite radios are working and well-restored.

that, says my ’24 Philco and ’23 Atwater Kent and approx ’30 RCA Victor, is the hard part.

slapping tubes in them is the easy part.

Browniejr says:
December 15, 2010 at 3:07 pm

Giants or Dodgers?
Cowboys or Redskins?
Cal Bears or Stanford?
Ohio or Michigan?

Browniejr says:
December 15, 2010 at 3:15 pm

Hopefully my speeling has impraved since the coffee kicked in...

Oh darn.

bgbear says:
December 15, 2010 at 3:23 pm

red wire or blue wire?

swschrad says:
December 15, 2010 at 3:33 pm

@bgbear: LOL.

anybody up for some Murdoch Headline Time fun? it's one of those afternoons, and there is plenty of fodder for the backstab-and-wink tabloid headline all around us.

f'r instance:

Vikes Play At ‘The Bank’
While Parents Cry Homelessness

metaphizzle says:
December 15, 2010 at 3:34 pm

This wire has a little star.
This wire has a little car.
My, what a lot of wires there are!
stinkybisquit says:
December 15, 2010 at 4:22 pm

Love the mile high baseboard (even though it's covered with paint)!

Brian Lutz says:
December 15, 2010 at 4:26 pm

I’m still a PC diehard (mostly because I build my own desktop systems,) but I’ve pretty much gotten over the whole Mac vs. PC thing by now. For a few months earlier this year my job involved testing of iPhone apps, which is mostly doable on a PC if you know how to deploy to a device, but did also spend some time on a Mac as well. In the relatively short time I was on one, I was never really quite able to get used to it, but I think it’s more a matter of it being different than of one being better or worse than the other.

I decided several years ago to stop being a fanboy and to actually try some of the alternatives for these things, which means that even though there was a time I said I’d never do so I now own both Apple and Sony products. Now I just need to start drinking Pepsi and reading DC comics…

GardenStater says:
December 15, 2010 at 5:16 pm

@swschrad: Don’t know if this qualifies, but I saw a great headline a few weeks ago, from a news outlet on Cape Cod:

“Missing Baby Found in Sandwich”

That one just stopped me in my tracks.

LalaWojo says:
December 15, 2010 at 5:50 pm

I absolutely LOVE that radio—is it vintage or reproduction? And where can I find one??? And is that some sort of clock or another radio on the shelf under it?

swschrad says:
December 15, 2010 at 6:05 pm

@LaLaWojo: I counted 4 bakelite radios.

@GardenStater: those big ol' pickle planks, they really overwhelm the meat, don’t they?

swschrad says:
December 15, 2010 at 6:09 pm

oops, 3 radios and a file box. but maybe there are little radios in the file box 😃

http://www.antiqueradio.org/welcome.htm is a good site to start looking at/for old radios and old radio collectors. so is http://www.theoldradiofixerupperguy.com/

Pencilpal says:
December 15, 2010 at 7:55 pm
To make a pot of water boil fastest, leave the kitchen and sit down at the computer to read Bleats.

**Jon says:**  
December 16, 2010 at 7:14 am

You know what would be a neat experiment for school age children like Nat? The Monty Hall problem (similar to “Let’s Make a Deal”). It has several interesting components:

1) Basic math most people will understand.
2) A survey component, since a child could do the game on multiple people to see what they actually do vs. what they ought to do.
3) A history component, since it was first popularly published in Parade and is associated with a popular game show (that is back on the Game Show Network?!).
4) A graphical component, where the child diagrams the different options/outcomes.
5) A psychology component, where a child could talk about limits to rational decision making. (IOW, the rules are simple but people still consistently take the wrong strategy.)

**Jon says:**  
December 16, 2010 at 7:18 am

Though boiling water is a lot more straight forward and I still argue with my parents over whether I should fill the coffee pot with cold water or hot water to get the best tasting coffee.

**xrayguy says:**  
December 16, 2010 at 1:29 pm

If we keep tuning into the Bleat on a regular basis, and save the snaps you post of each room, wall and area of your house, would we wind up with an entire tour of your home??

**Ben says:**  
December 16, 2010 at 5:59 pm

@bgbear: “IIRC you can boil cool water in a chamber with reduced pressure.”

Yes, you’re right, there is the pressure factor. For the sake of this context, I’m assuming normal Earth pressures, since I don’t find myself trying to boil water in a near-vacuum very often. Except for that one time I tried to make ramen while floating in space, but that might’ve been a dream.

**swschrad says:**  
December 16, 2010 at 10:36 pm

@Ben: normal Earth pressures at what altitude? there is a reason they have “Above 5000 feet” instructions on cake mixes, for instance.

**Will says:**  
December 17, 2010 at 12:08 pm

Here, at about 6300’ above sea level, water boils at 209 degrees.
Ben says:
December 17, 2010 at 5:07 pm

Thanks Will, I wasn’t sure what the high-elevation boiling point is but I was pretty sure it doesn’t qualify as “cool water.” I live at almost exactly 5000′ (the official elevation here is 4982′, but the city isn’t exactly flat so I don’t know my precise elevation here), and we still have to wait a while for water to get hot enough to boil.

steveH says:
December 18, 2010 at 1:52 am

@Joe Sixpack:

“All Apples are above $1000.”

Except the ones priced below that.

Bad day at the center, Joe?

Gene Dillenburg says:
December 24, 2010 at 11:51 pm

To the guy that couldn't figure out how to use OS X, maybe computers aren't for you.

I use computers every day. Have done so for nearly a quarter-century. I know a bad interface when I see one, and I was looking at one on that Apple. Nonsensical, unlabelled icons. A deeply hidden off button. Simply getting the window you want is a struggle. The other day, James was all excited about an app that actually allowed him to move a file from one folder to another. Yikes.

I was at a Sears the other day, and saw that the “high end” Foreman grills do indeed use translucent plastic for the bun warmers, though the main shell remains opaque.

Fred says:
December 26, 2010 at 2:39 pm

“deeply hidden off button” Huh? All you do is....

Oh you sly dog, you almost got me sucked in didn't you. Well, I'm not gonna go there...
This will be short, but so am I. I have a column to do, and it’s late, and I spent some of the evening hours at Target getting the Christmas cards. This year I didn’t come with the silly idea that the machines could read something formatted in that strange, outdated “Mac” format. Last year every photo kiosk in town acted as if I’d folded up a floppy and tried to stick it in the optical drive. This year I mailed myself the photo, booted into Windows, downloaded it, and

The lovely sound of drive failure. By now there were the usual warnings on the screen – new hardware detected! You may be at risk for viruses! New hardware detected! Running 42 wizards! Every time I open Windows on this machine I have to pop the balloons with the point of the cursor; you feel like a clown in a bad mood. A warning said my disk needed to be examined by check disk, which would check the disk. I ran check disk, and was informed it could not check the disk. Okay. But I got the photo off click CLICK click CLICK, and drove to Target, hoping.

The kiosk read the thumb drive with all the speed and confidence of an illiterate trying to comprehend a Welsh road sign, then finally admitted that it could read the picture. I found a design that wasn’t entirely objectionable, added a message, selected a font – honestly, if they didn’t supply Hobo or
Comic Sans, would anyone complain? I suppose they might:

Hey! Where's the funny rubbery font from the 60s?

It's actually from the 20s, sir, but people associate it with the 60s because it was cheap and available, so it was used by hippie publishers putting out street magazines.

Okay, well, what about the funny one? Funny Sands?

That's Comic Sans, sir, and should only be used for the tombstone of the man who invented it. Just like wood-grained plastic should only be used for the coffin of the man who first proposed its use in cars and consumer electronics.

I don't know about that. I thought it wood-grained plastic was classy.

You're wrong. It summed up the entire gimcrack ersatz cheap-o crapfest of American design in the late sixties and early seventies, when industrial designers thought they would accommodate the design preferences of the Greatest Generation while using new cheap composite materials. This was a fundamental misunderstanding of the demographic, since these people had grown up in an era when new synthetic substances were instantly adapted to consumer devices, and wood was associated with early radio and record player devices. Which is to say, things Mom and Dad had.

What happened to wood-grained plastic, then?

A new wave of design, mostly following the lead of Sony's innovative mid-70s design, encouraged whimsical concepts that separated the function of the devices from their appearance. Table-top radios, for example, were no longer boxy units; they began to morph into the shapes we now associate with boomboxes. This meant rounded edges, which were seen as the new contemporary paradigm, and the style spread to other manufacturers until no one in America could put a bill or other sort of envelope on top of the radio to remind them to mail it, because it would slide off.

Oh, come on. Surely they had rounded edges on radios. I've seen Crosley reproduction units that were quite smooth.

Granted, but the curves were gentle, and they didn't have top-loading cassette chutes, or buttons on top. The standard design put the dial and other controls on the front, and the challenge was to distinguish the model through excellent design. The golden age of counter-top radio? Between the mid-30s and the fifties, when designers sought to perfect a simple concept and set their designs apart.

After that?

Transistors pulled design in an entirely new direction, and tabletops became dull. Which is why the boombox look seemed so modern.

How do I know my font choice will be rendered correctly?
Excuse me?

_The picture on the screen does not dynamically refresh to reflect the font I’ve chosen. I can’t tell if my message will be too big._

I can’t help you there. I usually work in grocery. I’m just helping out for a friend on a break.

_Okay, thanks. Hey, you don’t have Neutral, do you? Everyone’s using Neutral these days._

No, and it’s Neutra. It’s a played-out font, used mostly to refer to the zeitgeist implied by the clean, neo-30s look of the font employed by the Obama campaign. While type enthusiasts applaud its clean look, we fear the inevitable serif backlash, and the rise of fussy 70s fonts.

_So maybe I’ll just go with . . . okay, Arial._

There is a distressed version of Arial, called Caliban.

_That’s okay. Thanks. When will my cards be ready?_

Do you have any shopping to do?

Yes.

That’s too bad, because they’ll be ready 27 minutes after you’re done shopping, and I presume you’ll be getting ice cream? Yes? So you can sit and let it melt or come back tomorrow.

_I’ll come back tomorrow._

Very good.

–

I’m paraphrasing the conversation of the person next to me, but you get the idea.

Hey, here’s some of my radios. No reason.
Pass it along, if you wish

56 RESPONSES TO wood-grained plastic
PickyPicky says:
December 17, 2010 at 12:23 am

I'm no font maven — if I can read it, I'm OK — but there's an especially smelly locale in hell reserved for the louse who thought it would be just the cutest thing ever to design a font that had a capital 'i' indistinguishable from the lower-case 'l'.

metaphizzle says:
December 17, 2010 at 12:26 pm

I'll have to agree with you on that one.

MJBirch says:
December 17, 2010 at 5:59 pm

Am I the only one to catch the “Tempest” reference buried in a font joke? (Caliban a distressed version of Arial.) Arial = Ariel

I guess so. Being an ex-English major can be ... lonely.

(Actually, I think there IS a font called Caliban. Must check.)

MJBirch says:
December 17, 2010 at 6:02 pm

Yes, there is! Like a brush script, mildly italic, very readable. Looks almost like someone's handwriting.

I care about typefaces. Someone, hire me please.

steveH says:
December 18, 2010 at 1:48 am

@ swschrad:

It's not that it's so picky about its friends, it has Standards to uphold.

And no, not like Groucho's, either.

Dana W says:
December 18, 2010 at 2:28 pm

Why not partition the thumb drive you use to transport photos into Fat 32?

Then the Kiosk should read it just fine. They are cheap enough to keep a spare one just for said kiosk.

I keep a Fat 32 thumb drive around for when I need to pass data to computer disadvantaged Windows owners.

You can do this is OSX and never have to boot into that Windows junk. Just stick the key in, fire up disk utility, and re partition said key. End of problem.
Christmas Diner today? Why, yes. Links at the end.

Ad I saw online today. Somehow, I don’t think this guy was in wikileaks’ crosshairs.

WikiLeaks Targets Hedge Fund

Intamous hedge fund manager John Bell is thought to be WikiLeaks next target.
Bell has been targeted because of his funds closely guarded stock trading strategy.

In a move designed to thwart WikiLeaks, John has revealed his secret trading strategy for free at his new website.
John claims his strategy is so simple his “14 year old son used it to make $13,000” Click Here for More

Brought to you by Stock Market Magic inc.

Stars and Bars, what a day. Had seven deadlines. Got everything in. Let that be my epitaph, then: HE GOT EVERYTHING IN. People will nod in respect at the weathered headstone, and say “there was a fellow who got his copy in. Note well his example, children, and strive to meet his standard.” A cenotaph will be erected in the public square, honoring the guy who did not head straight for the office pot luck but banged out a correction to that AP obit on
Blake Edwards. They said Dick Powell played Richard Diamond on TV. Fools!

Right? I hope so. It was David Jannsseen. Dick Powell played him on the radio. It was a marvelous little show, at least when Edwards wrote it – the guy was all of 25 years old, and could bang out a tight witty script week after week. At least he knew how all the episodes ended: since Powell had a career as a crooner in the WB musicals, people would have been somewhat disappointed if he didn't sing. It's like a Schwartznegger movie where he doesn't shoot someone. He'd made a nice career pivot when he played Phillip Marlowe (!) in “The Big Murder, My Sweet in the Lake,” even though he seemed small and scrawny and utterly devoid of Marlowe's battered laconic nobility, but people always wanted to like him. He's just a likable guy.

“Richard Diamond” was a cross between the detective cliches and the musical persona, and Powell was pretty good. At the end of every ep he was in his rich girlfriend's apartment, and hello, there's a piano. Tra la la.

As for the rest of Edwards’ work, yes: clunkers there were. The man could not resist holding a shot too long to milk a withered teat in the hopes it would produce another laugh. I don't like “Bleakfast at Tiffany's,” as the hollibly lacist Mickey Looney chalactah would have said, but also because it's . . . oh, I don't know. Audrey Hepburn is lovely, of course, but it's a weightless thing. The work with Peter Sellers is different – there are moments of concentrated hilarity that made me laugh harder than anything else ever had, at the time.

So I finished that post and hit the pot luck. There were three meatballs left. I took two. You just can't be the guy who takes the last meatball. Also, I'd had lunch already, because – well, this morning I had to shoot off to Target to pick up some white T-shirts, because they were doing tie-dye at my daughter's orchestra practice. Don't ask. I have no idea. I'd forgotten all about this, but I'd entered an alert in my iPhone, and bing-bong up it comes the night before: oh. Right. Crap. On the way out of the house I grabbed a Target coupon that came in the mail: a free frozen entree if I bought $25 worth of groceries. Expired tomorrow. Well, stock up. So I hit the store, pick up the T-shirts, throw staples in the cart, choose an entree, then check out – AUGH. Four lanes open, and the shortest is run by a nice lady who moves as though she is doing an interpretative dance called “Sadness,” underwater. Everything – just – takes – a – long – time. Go to the next lane. No: the customer dropped a jar of salsa, and it's clean-up on Lane 16. Reminded me of the old ads for new improved plastic shampoo bottles: you could drop them, and not worry about bloodshed or pain!!

Really: it was a serious sales point. If all your bathroom items came in glass bottles, then you'd be sure to drop one eventually. This meant: slippery soap-covered foot-piercing glass shards everywhere. Plastic bottles were a miracle. I'll bet people screwed up some courage and dropped them on purpose just for the sheer mad thrill of it. They bounced! Good heavens, they bounce! This is why I find this scene the ne plus ultra of self-righteous boomer booshwa:
Oh, this said it all, man! Go to work for Dow and get a house and 2.5 kids and a dog and the whole establishment grind, man, but don't worry: according to the movies, at your most desperate point of self-examination a free-spirited girl wearing a headband will come into your life and teach you what it means to be real, and there will be comic misunderstandings, and the audience will laugh – not entirely unsympathetically – with your wife, who has her hair up and wears a mustard-colored outfit made of Fortrel. She will be terribly concerned with what the neighbors will think, and you will have to ask, in an anguished tone, whether that really matters. It'll be great! Except for the part after the movie where you realize she gave you the clap and you're divorced and living in a cinderblock apartment now and the kids call now and then, but they hated Free-Spirited Girl because she didn't shave her pits, and Mom just cried for a year.

But at least you're not in Plastics anymore! Because they fired you.

Heh. Just kidding. Always suspicious of those Free-Spirited Girl stories though; based on personal experience, it was like a roller-coaster that flies off into space because no one bothered to complete the track. Thinking ahead just complicates things! Let's enjoy the ride while we can. Yes, had a few of those in college; FSGs always see-sawed between Brutes and Troubadours, tiring of one genre, moving to the next.

I don't know why anyone would want to be 20 again. I can understand why you'd want to be 20, but not again.

Anyway, I'd already had lunch. It was pathetic. Bought some Healthy Choice Option Meals; turkey and mashed potatoes and gravy and vegetable stuffing, 300 calories, full of vitamins, 300 calories. Soylent Brown, mostly, but you put enough pepper on it, and it's okay.

Then again, you put pepper on wet newspaper, it's okay.
Before I woke this morn – no, stop, don’t go, this isn’t a dream story. Okay? Well, yes, it is, but it’s pertinent. I was having a chat with someone about web design, and lamenting how much I missed the ability to make the site look exactly the way I wanted since I switched to WordPress. Maybe, I said, I should go back to the old style, but keep a duplicate version going so people could still hop over to comments.

Yes. This is what I dream about.

Comments were the main reason I switched, and I’m happy about that. The other reason: archives. You have no idea what a pain it was to hand-code those little archive calendars. But I’ll be going to something simpler for ’11 – should be up in the second half of January, with no Flash. (Yes, I have heard your cries.) I think next week will be Promo Week – I’ve been slack ‘n’ lax with all the updates, I know. I’ve even been a Bad Boy, Social-Media-Wise, letting Lint go fallow, Twittering less. So? It’ll all come back. I’ve been busy . . . and Monday, you’ll get some hints about what’s coming up.

There’s a Diner: this week, of course. Of course! I told you I was back on the weekly schedule. It’s the first of two Christmas Diners, but they’re not connected plot-wise. Good thing, too. I didn’t intend for this one to go 30 minutes, but started blabbing and the time just evaporated. The music starts about halfway through; otherwise you can listen while you do something else. iTunes subscription page here, or MP3 here.

Have a grand weekend, folks; me, I’ll be testing something tonight I’ve been saving for a while. Hint: 46. Any guesses?

124 RESPONSES TO a lahcense for your minkey

Joe Broderick says:
December 17, 2010 at 8:56 pm

James,

Don’t you know that “MAC” stands for “Mega-Awesome Computer”?

John says:
December 17, 2010 at 8:58 pm

Considering this is the Nostalgia Greenhouse With Extra CO2 Pumped In For Vigor, I am surprised no one has yet picked up on the I don’t know why anyone would want to be 20 again. I can understand why you’d want to be 20, but not again… Maybe the immediately preceding reference to girls met in college put readers off. It occurs to me that while most correspondents are warmly enthusiastic about this site, they themselves are not thinking as much of college years – or old flames – as our host is.
Yes; yes, say I; 20 was fun – and so was college, and so were the girls met in college – but really, all 20 was was what came before 21, 22, 23, etc. I like to think that not even 50 was climactic.

**hpoulter** says:
December 17, 2010 at 8:39 pm

@JamesS – right on (but we're outnumbered here – keep yer head down)

**swschrad** says:
December 17, 2010 at 10:03 pm

@hpoulter, @JamesS: so I suppose those of us who also use SunBlades are the lone gunslingers come to clean the town up?

some folks get by OK with a mouse. us power users, we need a RAT.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:
December 17, 2010 at 11:19 pm

@CaliforniaJeff

“How can an idiot be a police officer?!”

“Well, all he has to do is enlist…”

Ah, if were only as simple as that. Better you should hope you never get the Blue Religion. It gets into your very marrow and you are never the same afterward.

**Charles D. Shell** says:
December 18, 2010 at 1:32 am

46 . . .

Okay, a quick Google search unlocks your scheme.

Palladium!

Atomic number 46! Palladium!

And a little research reveals that it's primarily used in catalytic converters . . .

Ah hah! You're building a catalytic converter! That, or that weird 'arc reactor' thing from Iron Man.

**hpoulter** says:
December 18, 2010 at 7:02 am

Cold Fusion!

**bgbear** says:
December 18, 2010 at 9:20 am

@Mark E. Hurling, you know that was a quote from the PP movie, right and not a personal opinion?
Gerry says:
December 18, 2010 at 11:29 am

Correction to my earlier comment about Dick Powell…

He appeared in “Cornered”, not “Crossfire”.

hpoulter says:
December 18, 2010 at 1:17 pm

@bgbear – right. context is everything.

Inspector Jacques
Clouseau: How can a blind man be a lookout?

Chief Inspector
Dreyfus: How can an idiot be a policeman? Answer me that.

Inspector Jacques
Clouseau: It's very simple, all he has to do is enlist.

Chief Inspector
Dreyfus: Shut up!

fizzbin says:
December 18, 2010 at 2:53 pm

@hpoulter…rats, ya beat me to “How can a blind man be a lookout?”

“Yes, we will have to do something about your stomach". And NOT
“In a rit of fealous jage…”😊

pfsm says:
December 18, 2010 at 3:09 pm

When does Manic Pixie Dream Girl meet Neo Maxi Zoom Dweebie?

Quoth « The Big Think says:
December 18, 2010 at 3:35 pm

[...] lileks [...] 

Mark E. Hurling says:
December 18, 2010 at 4:47 pm

Oh yeah, I know bgbear. It's still true though.

swschrad says:
December 18, 2010 at 5:38 pm

@Charles D Schell: cold fusion! of course! Lileks is going to Utah and
will scam the government and Toyota with cold fusion! WE get paid
read the Bleatplus next year, not the other way around!

brilliant!

how one uses cold fusion to make web sites, as has been rumored, is
presently unknown. there must be an adapter in that blue box.
GSC says:
December 18, 2010 at 8:49 pm

How is “Plastics!” boomer bushwa?

Nobody associated with that movie were boomers except a few bit players or extras.

The writers and director were born in the '20s and '30s. Hoffman was 30 in 1967 – he was one of those guys we weren't supposed to trust. Even Katherine Ross was 5 years older than the oldest boomer.

“The Graduate” belongs to its Silent Generation makers. It is their “bushwa”

A good movie. The sound track is blended with and enhances the story skillfully. It works for farce and comedy but not so well for drama. The characters are too two dimensional.

Foxfier says:
December 19, 2010 at 4:03 pm

*listens to the diner*

Oxhorn's Christmas for Geeks!

I *love* Oxhorn!

swschrad says:
December 19, 2010 at 7:49 pm

it's death by snowfall again here... in time for the Vile Queens road trip down Central Corridor way, 5 to 9 inches of snow.

it will be snow bowl conditions at The Bank, and the kicker at least is kvetching about the field being a rock-hard trainwreck.

winter storm warning. wonder if Da Bears are going to be able to fly into town.

another snowfall making travel treacherous, they say, on the 23rd into the 24th.

shaping up to be an old-fashioned winter here on the north plains.

Craig McNamara says:
December 19, 2010 at 7:57 pm

Well, since you brought up a Buck Henry-penned '60s movie, here's another one that I just discovered he wrote...along with a headphones ad that I think it inspired:

http://craigmcnamara.blogspot.com

Mark E. Hurling says:
December 19, 2010 at 8:34 pm

Da Bears will pull their own sled into town if need be. Think the Frazetta rock poster with polar bears pulling an armored warrior with the Himalayas in the background. They'll be there.
Owen Hawley says:
December 20, 2010 at 3:55 pm

Hint: 46. Earlier this week Lileks had written about Polly Pocket, and how she “swings both ways”. He wanted us to watch episode #46 on Polly's website videos. “Trust me” He said. I tried to look, but could not find the videos numbered.

John says:
December 21, 2010 at 8:10 pm

About four days and thirty posts ago, I put up an entirely self-serving link within a post of my own, and I am amazed and gratified to observe it is still getting hits. (Don't worry, the visitors' log only shows IP addresses: I only know where your computer is said to be, and nothing at all about you.) I've done this Lightweight Vanity Hyperlinking before without result, so I wonder why the big change this one time. Are so many readers right about 50 years of age? I'd believe that. Or was it the fact that I posted so late in the day, after the Groupies (a/k/a the Lifers) knocked off and a less tendentious crowd moved in? (I have actually hypothesized that “Al Federber” and “Joe Sixpack” are inventions of our host, rocks with designer lichens plopped purposefully in a stream of fan mail.) I'm sorry nobody was tempted to move past the immediately hyperlinked page. Anyway, Occam's Razor Of Mouseclicking says it's just innocent interest, and anyway, I say thanks. And Merry Christmas!

Fred says:
December 26, 2010 at 5:53 pm

“… Irritable Bear and Mr Tink and Margie”

And don't forget poor razzed Doris…

Dale says:
December 31, 2010 at 2:30 am

That's lee-zonce, not lahcense.

← Older Comments
A lahcense for your minkey | The Bleat.

StarTribune Column

Please install and activate the "Twitter for WordPress" plugin to use this section.

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?

© 2011 The Bleat.
It’s the Christmas Cold, brought to you by Children, America’s favorite vector for infection. I don’t have it; zincing it up and beating it back as I did the last one. Wife is starting to get it. Kid is bouncing along nicely, but she’s clogged. I taught her how to wrap a present today, and made sure not to rub my eyes after I handled the scissors she’d used. It’s touching your face that gives you the cold – nose or eyes. The eyes have no idea how to repel a cold infection.
They believe that should be handled by the day laborers. The eyes think they’re special. Don’t bother us! We’re trying to keep him from walking into walls.

Saturday: Target with daughter. Rare are the times I can get her to go along on errands, since she’d rather sit at home and chat online or draw or such, and the old days of weekly Target trips together are wispy memories at best. But she enjoys it, as long as I don’t do anything that suggests I am a person with a problem, such as hopping on the cart and riding it down the lot. First: get more Christmas cards. I stood in line behind a woman who upbraided the staff for their crappy photo kiosks, which couldn’t read ANYTHING. She stomped away scowling. I walked up and inserted my thumb drive with complete confidence. It worked, of course. The kiosks are the last repository of the soups of fin de siecle Austro-Hungarian bureaucrats.

Gnat likes to look at little kid toys; she finds them amusing. There’s probably also a little remember-when going on, too. The world wasn’t so toy-saturated when I was a kid; there were a few things at the drug store, an aisle at Ben Franklin, and the department stores downtown. Fewer toys, fewer brand extensions. Now the toys of your childhood persist, and are subject to endless permutation. Polly Pockets, once just a cheap means of satisfying the tiny-plastic-item need, have inexplicably branched into vivisection, for example. They have a line of toys called “Cutants,” which consist of things grafted onto organic creatures. The display lets kids push buttons and assemble their own Cutants! Natalie thought it was creepy as heck; as we approached the Cutants display there were two Target Market Girls looking at the display.

“They’re creepy,” said one.

“I think they’re scary,” said the other.

Turns out there are webisodes about the Cutants, and Polly swings both ways, not that it matters to Hip Sexless Silent Guy. You need to go here to watch Episode 46, and wait for the rewind moment, which occurs at 1:11. Trust me.

_Trust me._

You’re not hearing the real name of the character because it sounds too much like something else. Great job. Anyway, we like to set off all the motion-activated doll-babies, but only if there’s not a clerk around. That would be cruel. There was also the sad matter of our favorite Mouse, who had fallen and could not get up. NOTE: sometimes I have to hit reload on preview to make these things show up. You may have to do the same.
working weekend, more or less. So many things to add to the site, so much scanning to do; didn't even get the chance to sit down and watch a movie. No, I watched two movies, but with one eye. Put it on the second screen and pay half-attention, presuming that full attention would be annoying, and make me restless and want spaceships or monsters to come along and pick up the pace – neither of which occurs in the original novel, in this case “The Great Gatsby.” I watched the obscure 1949 version with Alan Ladd. Yes, he was there, sitting right alongside, mostly bones and smelly clothing. He's not a bad Gatsby, but he's not a good one either; too short. Redford had the look, I suppose, but you couldn't stop thinking “that's Robert Redford,” and if you don't think Mia Farrow is the most desirable creature in the world, that's two strikes. The 1949 version is quite literal in spots, right down to the real estate agent who sells the house saying “You can see the lights on the Buchanan's dock from here!” You expect someone to say “gosh, that'll come in handy when everyone's drunk and we need a metaphor.” Maybe that's in the book. I don't know.

I also watched “The Lemon Drop Kid,” a Hope vehicle based on Damon Runyon. I'm not a big Hope fan. He's great, of course, breezy and dang near post-modern with all that winking at the camera and extra-textual references, such as when he calls a cow “Crosby.” Ha! Because that's the other guy he was in movies with who isn't in this one.

This is interesting, he said, hoping it might be. As I may have mentioned last week, I'm on a Bob & Ray listening kick. Hard to know what you've heard or haven't heard – the collections on archive.org are a mess, and if you can find a collection that's sequential and properly dated, the speed is off. Anyway. One episode began with the orchestra conductor practicing a piece before they went on the air. Of course, there was no orchestra conductor; they used some brisk happy banjo-whistling music taken off a record. That was the joke. The sound of the orchestra conductor practicing is very odd, and at first listen you don't know what's going on. Who is singing? Why is he singing? What sort of music is this? But the other day it came up twice in the playlist, and the second time I heard it, I got it. So: name that tune!
Bob & Ray Mystery by Lileks

The real hints come around :54. Once you get it, it all makes perfect sense. By the way, everything you need to know about the business of radio you can learn from Bob & Ray’s career. They bounced around a lot. They were on every network. I presume some brilliant program manager would come along and fire ‘em. In a just world, they would have been on the same network at the same time every day for 25 years.

A bevy of items for this week, as you’ll see. A bevy? No, a flood. A cavalcade. We’ll start with some minor stuff: three matchbooks, starting here, and five comics, starting here.

Later in the week: hoo boy. And you can quote me on that. You can walk up to people and say “Hoo boy, as that Lileks chap said.” Enjoy the day; see you around.

59 RESPONSES TO best week ever!

Bob Walsh says:
December 20, 2010 at 7:03 pm

I had never heard of Bob & Ray until Kurt Vonnegut mentioned them in one of his essays. He was right, they are timeless, because their absurd quality will never grow old.

Benzin Bruder says:
December 20, 2010 at 8:33 pm

OK!!! here is an exercise to try the next time you encounter a goodly number of those stuffed toy birds that repeat what they hear, but at a higher pitch:

1) turn them ALL on.
2) say something into the microphone of one of them.
3) make sure it is then close enough to the others for them to pick up what it repeats.
4) stand back and enjoy sound wave.

Before my two sons grew up and became annoyed by the antics of their dad it was a favorite diversion at the Imaginarium. They had an entire wall of those things. It can also still be pulled off, to a lesser extent, at the Cracker Barrel (not as many birds).

jleinatl says:
December 20, 2010 at 10:45 pm

Wow! Only Lileks could induce comments about Polly Pockets, The
Rite of Spring and Charleton Comics in one comment section.

Queeg says:
December 20, 2010 at 11:37 pm

My introduction to Bob & Ray was the Norman Lear (remember him?) film “Cold Turkey.” Then there was their public radio show, and some books based on scripts from that show. Later I discovered the RadioArts audio collections put out by Larry Josephson, which introduced me to their older work. It's great to know that there are even more recordings to be found out there on the great intertubes.

A side note: Keith Olbermann is a Bob & Ray fan, and is credited on some of the RadioArts recordings. “The Worst Person in the World” was a recurring Bob & Ray character, and I’d really like to believe that Olbermann borrowed that title in an ironic sense. But that's probably stretching the bounds of credulity.

Wagner von Drupen- Sachs says:
December 21, 2010 at 7:37 am

@metaphizzle: Well played, Amigo!

xrayguy says:
December 22, 2010 at 12:56 pm

Comic Sins
Rookie Cop-I would think this title could only run for about a year; then it would have to retitle to “Off Probation Cop”, then “Veteran Cop”. By the way, cover #2, the ejector rod in his pals revolver is way outta whack, probably not a real gun.
Pudgy Pig-I can see the bear track fine, so why does PP need a magnifying glass?? If his sight is that impaired, he shouldn't be allowed out with a gun.

xrayguy says:
December 22, 2010 at 1:01 pm

I remember Bob and Ray showing up in a Vonnegut movie talking about “chronosynclasticinfintabulum” and “Ice 9”. I think it was the first time I ever saw them.

Ross says:
December 23, 2010 at 6:41 am

I'd have to doublecheck(it's been a while since I drove through that neighborhood), but the corner where Smally's was is now part of the 19th Street Viaduct.
Because a chicken can't swim.

Jeannie Weller Cooper says:
December 26, 2010 at 8:31 am

Had a “working Christmas” myself and listened to the “Command Performance” recordings off YouTube. 1942, ’43, and ’44 were there, and included Judy Garland and Dinah Shore singing “Silent Night” “O Little Town” and an ongoing feud between Benny and Allen. I mention this because Hope was the MC and really funny. Sharp and possibly sardonic. Merry Christmas to you and yours, and here's to the collapsing infrastructure of the US of A.
I’m aswell a bit anemic and all-a-quiver

More snow. Because we needed some more snow. It put a nice coating over the old snow, which had become snirt quite quickly. But we got more than a dusting, and there’s no place to put it. Not like water, which manages to go away on its own relatively quickly. Speaking of which:
the sewer drain is backed up. Had it roto-rooted two years ago; it's clogged again. Empty the bathtub upstairs, and two floors below, tsunami.

Daughter down the street to a birthday party today; they went sledding on the front yard. They have a good slope. I'd let kids use mine, but I have too much slope, and not enough stopping area – kids would hit the end and fly off right into the intersection.

Today's little piece of Christmas nostalgia:

This was our living room when I was very young. The enormous cardboard Santa? I don't know where he came from. May have been a gas station promotion my dad brought home. The house – a classic 1961 rambler – had one wall covered in panelling, and a rather restrained fireplace. We used it once a year, on Christmas, which doesn't explain why the stones are so smoky. On the walls were plastic-type candelabras, which matched the clock; the candles were never used. It would be absurd to think you would use the candles. They were special. Might as well have given off choking clouds of arsenic and lead. Looking at it anew, I realize the fireplace pokers have been removed from the fireplace tool ensemble, and leaned against the wall. Why? Were they actually Fresno stick aliens?

Here's a holiday surprise: GE commercials featuring . . . well, you'll see. All your favorite elves, including Poindexter Mel Cooley elf and Meany the Shop Foreman elf, hawking hair driers. We had a few of those appliances; I specifically recall the combination can-opener and knife-sharpener. What an age of miracles, of push-button space-saving devices! Also ugly clocks that exemplified the diminishing “Americana” vogue, soon to be overtaken and forgotten – then brought back in the early 70s as “natural” and “organic” and somehow more honest than things you plugged in. By I digress. Here: eight minutes!
Today's updates: there's a non-Christmas update in the 30s section, which has a few more years of 1930s songs.

There's a very-Christmas update in the 30s section, with eight Christmas ads.

Here's some Christmas music: nine tracks.

One: We begin with a fellow who lives around these parts, a personal hero.

Two: Then it gets all churchy, yo – a sprightly childhood favorite that always reminded me of Christmas services, when everyone would try to sing this one and hang together. Love the way it begins: HERE IT IS.

Three: nothing can touch the swank lush sounds of the Jackie Gleason Orchestra. Music for Mom and Dad to sit by the fire and the tree and have a cocktail after the kids were down, and think what wonders 1962 might bring.

Four: Anna Maria Alberghetti. Just lovely. As a little kid I listened to this one, rapt. It's almost a lullaby.

Five: Maurice Chevalier! Another Goodyear staple. Zhonny wans a pare of skates, Susy wants a sled! Yes! The man had that little built-in chuckle down
I'm as well a bit anemic and all-a-quiver | The Bleat.

Six: There's really no way to explain this, except . . . well, they were a very popular band, and this was their Christmas record. Every singer in the band got a turn to talk to Santa. Note the difference between Sully Mason's speaking voice and singing voice – sounds like a brute, then it's all velvet. The last fellow, of course, is Ish Kabibble.

Seven: a bracing splash of acid from the finest comic songwriter and parodist America produced. He didn't parody specific songs, but styles, and nailed them all as efficiently as possible. This is a lesser effort, but what the hell.

Eight: Well, yes.

And now, a public service note: the spam I deal with.

I hate spammers. We all hate spammers. A big bolshy boot in the yarbles is what they deserve, each and every. They clog the in-box, they yell in all caps, they clutter up comment threads in sites that don't have the time or desire to police the remarks. You can spot them a mile away. Last night I cleared out 1,725 pieces of spam. I would like each to be converted into a paper cup on the lips of the spammers, and then I would like them all to stick their faces in a lemon-juice shower.

Typical:

Hello, this is unquestionably a principally superb post. In principle I'd prefer to jot down like this too – taking time and real effort to make a brilliant post!!!. but what can I say!. I procrastinate alot and never appear to get anything done. Thank You

Great minds think alike:

Hello, this is unquestionably a certainly excellent submit. In concept I'd like to generate like this too – taking time and genuine energy to create a brilliant article...

Hello, this is unquestionably a really splendid publish. In principle I'd prefer to publish like this too – taking time and real effort to make a great post!!!.

Hello, this is a certainly terrific posting. In theory I'd prefer to write like this as well – taking time and genuine work to make a brilliant post.!!.

Hello, this is unquestionably a genuinely amazing article. In concept I'd wish to jot down like this as well – taking time and real energy to create a great write-up!!!.

Spies are apparently using the site to exchange code-phrases:

UNTOLD RICHES AWAITS 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 ultra links is HERE!
A way around this problem is with luminescent tags

A few pages later:

The darkest hour is that before the dawn

Oh, that's much better than the original, don't you think?

Apropos of nothing, a desperate cry from someone a-quiver with diffusion:

I am on the 1st day of a auto detox diet plan. I haven't had a affair to eat all day and I'm STARVING!! I cannot appreciate how individuals say that they did not feel athirst assuming this. I'm aswell a bit anemic and all-a-quiver and like I said, this is alone the antecedent day. I'm not a ample alone or huge eater either. I'm not assertive how diffuse I wil last.

Followed by another post with a link to some useless website selling fake purses:

Marry Cristmas!!

Sorry, that's still illegal.

User-friendly is so 90s:

some times its a pain in the ass to read what people wrote but this internet site is very user pleasant!.

Oh, this is an internet site? I had no idea.

Here I am taken to task by someone sounds like a very drunk Russian explaining my problems at 3 in the morning:

This information are bit incomplete, I must say the fact that research was carried out really good, but the trouble got here once you tried in order to put together this information and current it. No doubt you probably did your finest and I admire the fact that this can assist also, you need to study other posts as well to generate your posting honestly to the moment and really comprehensible. i'll PM you many of the clothes about this subject

I'll keep an eye out for the PM'd clothes; thanks.

Clever spambot slips in a reference to the commerce site it's pushing:
Interesting Blog, Dude! even though this was not what i was looking for
(I am on thelookout for full-length slips as a surprise gift for my wife )... I
certainly plan on visiting again! By the way what's is the most sexy night
Gown or slip anybody can suggest?

By some odd coincidence, his user name was something like sexy-slips-for-U.com. People might rightly wonder why he was asking this question. Or could it be some sort of expedition for to be the traffic of directing site? Okay
great job

Correct apart snatch the feed? It's easier than you think:

Totally, the piece of writing is in guarantee the actual very finest about
this definitely really worth although subject. We additional this and i?
michael searching ahead for your nearing web site articles or blog posts.
I also noticed that your site has some very good linking implemented to
it. I will correct apart snatch the actual rss feed to remain educated
associated with any kind of changes.

Noted.

71 RESPONSES TO i'm aswell a bit anemic and all-a-quiver

Fast Freddy says:
December 21, 2010 at 2:00 pm

Were those General Electric people nuts! Promoting a portable vacuum cleaner as a Christmas gift! Can you imagine the wife opening that up on Christmas? The only was to ruin your marriage more quickly would be to call up the Howard Stern show and complain about your sex life! Wow!

bgbear says:
December 21, 2010 at 2:03 pm

“sleeve the drain” sounds naughty

CaliforniaJeff says:
December 21, 2010 at 2:10 pm

James, I bet the last thing you expected when you posted spam examples was to inspire commenters to create even more examples in cutesy-mock font. You have created spam-bots of your own. lol

You could get them to do anything now, I hope you know.

They are awaiting your orders.
Maybe your first command should be for them to bring you a pizza, and to make sure it's hot.

swschrad says:
December 21, 2010 at 2:29 pm

@California Jeff:

v1@gr4 r0l3x sale4yew
to the seasonal spam be true

bgbear says:
December 21, 2010 at 3:15 pm

James Lileks, the Soupy Sales of the prairie.

Percy Dovetonsils says:
December 21, 2010 at 3:20 pm

I'm just floored by the reference to Anna Maria Alberghetti. I haven't heard that name in 20+ years, and now I have the strangest craving for Good Seasons salad dressing.

/checks out Ms. Alberghetti's picture at Wikipedia, lets out Tex Avery-ian wolf whistle while madly tapping one foot.

MJBirch says:
December 21, 2010 at 3:36 pm

Oh, good — I'm not the only one thinking that Mommie Dearest was at the door, bearing gifts.

re Christmas lights: years ago (okay, decades) a friend of mine decided to try out his new AWD vehicle right after a ferocious ice storm and invited me to come along. (PS: it worked beautifully.) At one point, we were admiring a stand of ice coated trees — The sun was shining, but the cold was so intense that nothing was melting. The light on the ice-covered branches made rainbow sparkles — lots of reds, blues, and greens. We each thought we were seeing things, but checked “uh, are you seeing colors?” “Yes, are you?” (And no, we hadn't been smoking funny cigarettes.)

My comment: “This must be how somebody got the idea of inventing Christmas tree lights.”

bgbear says:
December 21, 2010 at 3:42 pm

Anna Maria Alberghetti reminds me of the knock, knock joke I think I heard on the MTM show:

Knock Knock.

Who's there?

Anna Maria Alberghetti

Anna Maria Alberghetti who?

Anna Maria Alberghetti in a taxi honey
GardenStater says:
December 21, 2010 at 4:38 pm

@Percy Dovetonsils: Hooooowwwvvvvlllld is she?

😊

Vader says:
December 21, 2010 at 6:47 pm

Hmm. Human nature is a funny thing.

My first impulse on reading your paragraph about spy-spam was to post the cryptic comment “The birds fly south before the first snow.”

It’s a Hogan’s Heroes allusion, if you recall. I don’t remember the entire episode, but John Banner’s character was somehow blackmailed into delivering a message to an underground agent on behalf of the intrepid Heroes, and that was his recognition code line.

Philip Scott Thomas says:
December 21, 2010 at 8:58 pm

“Anna Maria Alberghetti reminds me of the knock, knock joke I think I heard on the MTM show”

Yes, you did hear it there. I remember that evening too. I didn’t get it at the time, and the parents had to explain it to me. And even after that I didn’t get it. Colour me stupid.

Lisa P says:
December 21, 2010 at 9:30 pm

“…all-a-quiver and like I said, this is alone the antecedent day.”

I don’t generally find myself all-a-quiver until the penultimate day.

Brad Johnston says:
December 21, 2010 at 9:34 pm

Here’s an interesting bit of trivia: In the opening credits for RTRNR by Rankin-Bass, they made a mistake. They tried to right “Copyright 1964 in Roman numerals (MCMLXIV), but they screwed up and wrote MCLXIV, or, 1164. Watch it and then freeze frame it. A little bit before General Sarnoff’s time, I’m afraid.

Brad Johnston says:
December 21, 2010 at 9:37 pm

WRITE Copyright 1964!! I’m getting old.

Patrick says:
December 21, 2010 at 9:39 pm

@bgbear:

“Sleeve the drain” sounds like something where one of our favorite topics is involved. Starts with an “L”, ends in “axatives.”
Patrick says:
December 21, 2010 at 9:47 pm

In regard to the ads, not only is Tom Lehrer’s Christmas song one of my favorites, but so is an act by one Mr. Stan Freberg.

Browniejr says:
December 21, 2010 at 11:25 pm

Useless fact: Ahura Mazda is the reason we celebrate Christmas Dec. 25th… he (or is it He?) was worshipped by Roman soldiers. The very early Christian church noticed church attendance/ collections dipped this time of year because of a Zoroastrian festival everyone enjoyed attending, so they decided to have a bigger and better celebration at the same time...

Ryan says:
December 22, 2010 at 8:41 am

What spam catcher do you use for WordPress? Akismet (the one that comes with it) isn't too bad… But I found that Spam Karma worked a bit better. That was probably 4-5 years ago now though, so who knows what else is out there.

Charlie Young says:
December 22, 2010 at 12:09 pm

I think the best solution to spam would be a good, old-fashioned automatic return to sender. I wonder if one can be developed?

Erik the Swede says:
December 22, 2010 at 9:38 pm

The living room picture made me feel a bit forlorn. The stocking seems lonely.

Fred says:
December 30, 2010 at 6:32 pm

Actually my understanding is that it's an open debate about the whole Christmas vs. Saturnalia vs Ahura Mazda vs Mithras as to which one came first. The general tendency is to believe that Christians stole the festival and rituals from religions around them and transformed them. But there is some thought that the winter celebrations were revived or created in response to Christmas celebrations.

I believe that Christmas first started as time of prayer and fasting but on that I’m totally ignorant.

Even though I’m a Christian I don't really have a dog in the fight as placing a date for a celebration doesn't render it true or untrue but I do find it interesting...
I'm as well a bit anemic and all-a-quer | The Bleat.

Still not finding what you're looking for?
Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!
Roto-rooter came. The roots defeated the roto. They’re suggesting a busted pipe outside, which is entirely possible, given the age of the house. Big fargin’ boatload of money sailing over the horizon, right there. Criminey. Well, good thing we had a frugal Christmas. Not that we ever went totally overboard; as much as I would love to shower my child with HEAPS OF THINGS it’s not a good idea to give them HEAPS OF THINGS just for the fun of unwrapping.
enormous plastic objects containing smaller plastic objects. Oh, the smile on their faces is wonderful, but you can get a smile on a kid's face if you give them ice cream for dessert, too. She'll be happy this Christmas because I got her the one thing she really, really wanted to buy with her own money at the Japanese toy store, and I pooh-poohed because a) it would take all her money and crowd out the other purchases she wanted to make, and b) I knew I'd get it for her for Christmas. She does not suspect. Trust me.

I just made her some popcorn, and the smile she gave me – thanks Dad! – was equal to the shine she'd display on gift #7 as she plowed through a stack on Christmas morn.

Uh oh: from the living room.

“Dad, did you set it on Popcorn?”

“No, why?”

“It's a little burned.”

The other day she put a small single-serving bag in the microwave, pressed the popcorn button. Reasonable assumption if you're ten. Damn near set off every smoke detector in the house. Now she's an expert on not using the popcorn setting. As it happened, I used a small ear of corn we bought at the Corn Palace in South Dakota last year – put it in a bag, tape it shut “with clear tape” – really? It has to be transparent? – and microwave it until rapid popping ceases. Which I did: I make a small bag nightly, and have an expert's ear for the moment when popping has crossed over from “rapid” to “entering the desultory phase.” But it's still a bit burned. Ah well; didn't spoil the moment. If only she was watching Christmas shows! She lives in a world where animation is plentiful, and all the classics are a bit old hat. In my day, as I've noted, there was only Rudolph and Charlie Brown – and later that Frosty thing, no thanks – and the Christmas shows were rare and wonderful. On Christmas Eve we'll watch “Twice Upon A Christmas,” but I can already tell she's doing it for my benefit as much as hers. Same with the Santa Coke puzzle.

Who cares? Dammit, child, I'm going to give you Christmas memories and traditions, and that's that. It would be easier if I could go all Spock on her, do an instant mind-meld as in Star Trek II: REMEMBER. But that didn't work out so well for McCoy.

As I warned: pre-holiday week, slight Bleats, big links.

Grandma's camera was a Brownie 2a. So? you say. Well: many years ago – after 9/11, if I remember – I put up a site of some pictures my grandmother took as a young woman. Since I'm overhauling the “biography” site, this meant rescanning and resizing and all that hooah. What once was a tiny site with tiny pictures now does justice to the originals, I think – and it includes a little video about the camera. I considered turning the pictures from sepia to greyscale, but they lose as much as they gain.
It's here. You will note, if you click on to the main index page, that it's rejiggered as well, and leads to two overhauled sites about your host. They're in progress, I suppose, but one of them has a very large version of the picture with me and Lara Croft, and the entire sequence of me threatening to punch Mr. T at a convention.

Joe Ohio is returning in 2011, as I've said; it will be a pay site, but don't worry. Cheap. Details tomorrow. In the meantime, if you'd like to see the spifficacious new interface for the Joe Ohio project (After this year's batch of 50 episodes, there will be 50 more – it's 1955, 1957, 1959), it's here.

And now, music! Today it's Kitschmas.

“It's Christmas Time All Over the World.” Sammy Davis Jr. Another Goodyear classic: Sammy Davis in a bouncy number whose rat-pack vibe is undercut by the kids. He had quite a voice, but everything just sounds so oily and sincerely insincere. This was the last song on the album.

“Sleigh Ride,” the Voices of Walter Schumann. The heyday of the pop-choral music. Most people in the 50s knew him from this sort of stuff, but he was also the composer of one of the most famous themes ever: Dragnet. Think of that when you listen to this.

“Rockin' Disco Santa.” Song-poem music. If you don't know the genre: ads in magazines asked people to send in their lyrics for hit songs. The companies would send back a letter saying hey, great lyrics! Give us a few hundred bucks and we'll cut a record. They'd get together some hack musicians and turn out songs all day long, then mail the albums to the suckers. The combination of lyrical ineptitude and bored C-list musicians produced some awesome horrors. Like this one.

“Santa Claus is Coming to Town,” Mitch Miller. From Mr. Cheerful Goatface himself, and a perfect example of a genre of music that always unnerved me: a lot of buzz-cut guys in black suits standing up and shouting out songs at the top of their lungs without a single jot of inflection. Mitch was born in 1911. He died last July.

“The Night Before Christmas.” Because you need to hear this in rap form, done by Art Carney.
“I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus,” in quasi-mambo form, brought to you by Ed Sullivan! Hey, if Gleason could do it, so could Ed. Most of Ed's orchestra's stuff was banal, straight Muzak, and had none of the saturated melancholy of the best Gleason orchestra work. Yes, I said that with a straight face.


“Rocket Ship Santa.” The Bellrays. Rockin! This is current stuff; the band still exists. Fuzz it up and put it mono, and you could have put this out 40 years ago.

–

Enjoy the links; see you tomorrow – with more!

42 RESPONSES TO rockin' disco santa

Kerry Potenza says:
December 22, 2010 at 5:04 am

You are doing right by Natalie by not spoiling her. She really does have everything: involved, loving parents, a wonderful pet, plenty of extracurricular activities, and the opportunity to travel.

I wonder if Natalie is a Bleat reader. If she is, you just spoiled her Christmas surprise…

Merry Christmas, Mr. Lileks and all of Bleat Nation!

Baby M says:
December 22, 2010 at 5:45 am

I've always liked the live-from-Vegas vibe of “Christmastime All Over the World.” The muted trumpets doing the little Chinese motif every time he mentions Hong Kong, that's just the cherry on top of the whipped cream.

Cory says:
December 22, 2010 at 6:00 am

Animated Christmas TV shows- one of the first, and one of the best “Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol” Many people find it the best retelling of Dickens and the music is quite good. I have read that the song “People” was originally composed for it, but it was shelved and brought back for the Broadway show Funny Girl sung by a pre-diva Streisand

madCanada says:
December 22, 2010 at 8:15 am
Awesome. Mitch Miller arranged & sang songs as if he believed harmony was a Commie Plot.

Diggin’ the kitsch, Genial Host! ‘Tis the season.

juanito - John Davey says:
December 22, 2010 at 8:56 am

Nice update of the Bio site. Many things we've seen before, but nicely refreshed.

As to Grandma's camera – say those are bigger. Why are old photos always so haunting?

MikeH says:
December 22, 2010 at 9:05 am

Good job on keeping Christmas in moderation. My sister in law spoils her kids with lots of crap. Now they are complete brats. If I have a christmas wish is they grow out of that!!

I go old school with popcorn. Oil in pan, pour popcorn seeds. Heat and shake over burner. Enjoy. A lot more control and lot less burning. Also control over post popping flavorings!!

shesnailie says:
December 22, 2010 at 9:25 am

@_v – sullen girl on a thresher… meet smiling girl on the beach…


Patrick McClure says:
December 22, 2010 at 10:19 am

James, loved the Grandma’a photos site. That lead me to your bio site(where I'd never gone) and then to the story of your mother's final days. I was not prepared for that. Sorry if this brings down the thread, but the story was beautiful and harsh, all at the same time. It brought back thoughts of waiting by my father's bedside in 1991 as he lay waiting for the release. Like your Mom, he raged and fought against the cancer for as long as he could. Then, when he realized that he could not win, he finally let go. Thanks for the gift of your prose and for what it helped me remember today. Merry Christmas and a Happy 2011.

lohwoman says:
December 22, 2010 at 10:42 am

I bought a Jackie Gleason Christmas MP3 as per your recommendation, James, and I must agree with you on Gleason v Sullivan. When I first heard Gleason's “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus,” I wished I hadn't known the lyrics. It's beautiful and lush (that is the only word that really works). The Sullivan rendition has a section that's almost frightening.

Also loved the Art Carney ditty from yesterday's mix. I laughed till I cried.

How about some Christmas music by The Ventures?
Rubo says:
December 22, 2010 at 10:45 am

LOVED, the old camera and pictures. I'm amazed that the bellows, on the camera, was still in good shape. Interesting, that those simple cameras, could take some very detailed photos.

Thanks again James, for sharing your life with us.

hpoulter says:
December 22, 2010 at 10:57 am

Speaking of Art Carney, it's time to get the family together around the old PC, pop up some popcorn, and watch the “Star Wars Holiday Special”. Happy Life Day, everybody!

http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=323909610753051544#

hpoulter says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:07 am

It's also time to listen to Jack Benny's Christmas programs. If you don't already have them in your collection, you can listen or download them here:

http://www.freeotrshows.com/otr/][Jack_Benny_Program.html

wiredog says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:17 am

From The Atlantic, something that is sure to get our host's dander up, “How ‘Jingle Bells’ by the Singing Dogs Changed Music Forever”

Once, at a friends house for a party, someone put a bag of popcorn in the microwave and entered an extra “0″. Amazing how much smoke that generates.

juanito - John Davey says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:35 am

Patrick McClure says:
December 22, 2010 at 10:19 am

James, loved the Grandma'a ph4otos site. That lead me to your bio site(where I'd never gone) and then to the story of your mother's final days. I was not prepared for that. Sorry if this brings down the thread, but the story was beautiful and harsh, all at the same time.

Discovered that touching work back when it first showed up in the early iteration of lileks.com. Revisited it in 2004 when my Father was diagnosed with cancer. Re-read it several times during the very difficult year that followed. Each time it said the same thing to me, and then something new. It still does. Read it again at the end of a very long day when we lost him in 2005. Re-read it in the morning before I, as his namesake, delivered his eulogy. It has become sort of my Rosetta Stone for dealing with loss. It's all there: Sorrow, lament, rage, regret, hope, joy, redemption, faith, love.
Just another example that the community that James has created here, is such a treasure.

**NukemHill** says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:40 am

*She does not suspect. Trust me.*

She reads. Trust me.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:40 am

Our daughter was born on December 13. As you might imagine this lead to an overload of presents that resulted in some unacceptable expectations and behaviors for a few years once she became ambulatory and could talk. Some stern words got her past that by the age of 8 after two years in a row of having to resort to them to my great regret.

As I've already said, she turned 21 last week. Dearly Beloved and I had noticed some changes and greater forebearance and maturity in her since we parted company in September when I drove her back to OSU. I don't know if this was the result of her RA job, and a dose of reality beyond her indoctrination by her professors or just part of a normal maturation process when they know better who they are and don't feel to compelled to jam it in your face.

In any event, she went out with her best friend (still!) since 5th grade this week and called us when we got home from work to let us know where she was. At 21 she has no obligation to do this but put in a pre-emptive strike against any possible worries on our part. The real pay-off came when she told Dearly Beloved she had used some of her birthday money for a Christmas gift for me. Dearly Beloved said that she would reimburse her for that because birthday money was for her to spend on herself. I'm tearing up again as I type this because after several years of wondering just how badly we might have failed, she has shown herself to have come shining through. God love her, I know I sure do.

**Joni** says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:44 am

@Mark – December 13th is the best possible day to have a daughter. Mine was on a Friday, even.

And I am wondering about Joe: will all 50 chapters be available at once, or will you be stringing them out? Because I seriously need to block out the time for when I am going to be able to read all of them. I know once I start I won't be able to stop (the '55 batch kept me up loooong into the night).

**bgbear** says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:44 am

I decided to go back to basics and made stove top popcorn in an iron skillet and was instantly transported back to the 1960s with my cousins all together being babysat by one mother or the other on a Friday night.
bgbear says:
December 22, 2010 at 11:49 am

Yes, Natalie may read the Bleat, however, James may be feeding her false information.

Now if Natalie is reading this comment. . .

juanito - John Davey says:
December 22, 2010 at 12:02 pm

Yes, Natalie may read the Bleat, however, James may be feeding her false information.


@Mark E. Hurling
Well done, Dad – I certainly hope we can come as close with both of ours, as you have done with yours.

Spud says:
December 22, 2010 at 12:22 pm

@Mark Hurling: I hold onto that hope as well. My three are still below the teen line, yet my 12 y.o. gives every indication of giving us a difficult teen phase. It's all good, and having my definition of love tested can be interesting.

@MikeH: I'm starting to phase my family out of the microwave popcorn habit. Stove top is messier and obviously not as quick, but I do not trust the “cooking medium” used with the popcorn kernels, particularly the low cal stuff. It has something to do with my margarine mistrust. I wonder how a synthetic oil/fat that is solid at room temperature lingers in my arteries(!).

RLR says:
December 22, 2010 at 12:38 pm

http://www.lileks.com/about/camera/3.html

What is the flexible vacuum hose-looking appendage coming out of the sidewalk box at frame left (Gramma's right)? Some oddball frigid Midwestern-specific infrastructure element?

Grampa looks like a sharp-dressed man who brooks no bunkum!

bgbear says:
December 22, 2010 at 1:07 pm

@RLR, as James said, it appears to be a gas pump. here is a similar image from a MN town in the 1920s:


RLR says:
December 22, 2010 at 1:14 pm

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8529
@bgbear: Yeah, I read our hosts' speculation, but if it were really a gas pump I'd think you'd be able to see the inspection tank assembly given the frame perspective.

bgbear says:
December 22, 2010 at 1:20 pm

grannie seems to be covering much of the image. see also this one:

http://www.shorpy.com/node/3515?size=_original

lohwoman says:
December 22, 2010 at 1:40 pm

Art Carney was in today's kitsch, not yesterday's. I listened to both “albums” back-to-back today. (Here's where I should throw in a Norton quote but all that comes to mind is, “Hellooooo, Ball.”) It would be worth listening to tomorrow, too. It's from 1954. He had good breath control.

John Powell says:
December 22, 2010 at 1:49 pm

That little “oriental” riff in “Christmas time all over the world” is something my daughter and I have loved for years. We listen for it and laugh together.

“Christmas with the Rat Pack” is a terrific Christmas album, except when Sinatra does a “serious” carol.

GardenStater says:
December 22, 2010 at 2:18 pm

I was also wondering about James’ disclosure of (G)Nat's Christmas gift. I would imagine that she checks the Bleat every day.

In fact, maybe she logs in as one of us!

OK, Joe Sixpack--the jig is up!

Bob Lipton says:
December 22, 2010 at 2:29 pm

Today's selection hurt my ears. However, at least it didn't include this one:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e61uC-5s9VU

Don't try to fight with me on annoying tunes, James. I'm older and nastier than you.

Bob

Bob says:
December 22, 2010 at 2:37 pm

I prefer Mitch Miller to many of the present day vocalists who seem to wander all over the scale in the name of “style” or “interpretation”.

And to Mark E Hurling, the past tense of the verb “lead” is “led”. Or
perhaps you meant “leads”. I know I’m being picky but I really love the English language. And no, I’m not an English major.

Gagdad Bob says:
December 22, 2010 at 2:46 pm

Just make sure you replace your existing pipe with the new trenchless technology. I had to have it done last spring. Not outrageously expensive, and you'll never have sewer line problems again.

Karen Han says:
December 22, 2010 at 3:01 pm

I will remember mr. mitch miller with great fondness, I used to listen to him as a child for one our holiday traditions. So sad to hear he passed away this year...

Shah Guido G says:
December 22, 2010 at 3:42 pm

Lohwoman, here's my favorite Norton line:

“As we say down in the sewer, time and tide wait for no man.”

Benzin Bruder says:
December 22, 2010 at 4:15 pm

Classic Christmas Music, and a tidbit (albeit, probably well known to this crowd).

Most everyone is familiar with the movie “A Christmas Story”; with Ralphie and his Red Rider BB-gun. At the point where Ralphie and his brother are waiting in line to see Santa they encounter Jean Shepherd doing a cameo. He is the guy who tells them “…the line starts back there”. Jean is not only the narrator, but the author of the short stories that generated the film (and one of its writers).

Anyway, at that time the music in the back ground is “Jingle Bells” by Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians. It is from a wonderful album called “’Twas the Night Before Christmas” on Decca Records. It is out of print, but can still be obtained online from vintage record dealers (I have my copy!).

madCanada says:
December 22, 2010 at 4:46 pm

@ Bob. Fair enough. Mitch Miller and Christina Aguilera might indeed have been put here to atone for each others' musical sins.

As the extreme opposite of xmas “kitsch”, may I present THIS. If this is your cup of tea, look at YouTube's “suggestions.” There's lots more in this vein.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0qa2UWoM0&feature=related

HelloBall says:
December 22, 2010 at 5:03 pm

@lohwoman
Here's where I should throw in a Norton quote but all that comes to
mind is, “Hellooooo, Ball.”

You rang? I was out having lunch with The Chef Of The Future.

Cory says:
December 22, 2010 at 6:57 pm

Ask Frank Sinatra about Mitch Miller

Stjohnsmythe says:
December 22, 2010 at 6:58 pm

James,
Take courage, that boatload of money may be smaller if MN's plumbing codes are like MI's: look for a drain service that can send a camera down the pipe and water-jet the innards. If they do discover a break, they may be able to run a sleeve inside the pipe and significantly reduce the excavation work.

shesnailie says:
December 22, 2010 at 8:34 pm

_@_v – fave ed norton quote – “when the tides of life turn against you, and the current upsets your boat. don’t waste those tears on what might have been, just lay on your back and float.”

shesnailie says:
December 23, 2010 at 1:32 am

_@_v – and in other news… i just got me a frickin’ shark with a frickin” laser beam” attached to its frickin’ head!!!!!!!

http://photos-f.ak.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ak-snc4/hs1364.snc4/163680_1492219314511_1504867971_31122858_2433053_n.jpg

chrisbcritter says:
December 23, 2010 at 3:22 pm

Thanks for the Ed Sullivan song – one of my favorites; i like how they tossed in the horn riff from Ray Charles's version of “One Mint Julep” (who needs eggnog?).

pentamom says:
December 23, 2010 at 7:53 pm

Speaking of Art Carney and Christmas, there's an episode from the first season of "The Twilight Zone" in which Carney plays an alcoholic department store Santa Claus who loses his gig and then becomes both the source and beneficiary of some supernatural Christmas cheer. Sort of a sympathetic look at the guy who Maureen O'Hara had to fire at the beginning “Miracle on 34th St.”, I guess. It's a good show.
Still not finding what you're looking for? Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!

2: Comic Covers
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.

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“I suppose you hear the joke about flushing money down the toilet all the time,” I said, signing a repair order that would cost several – as in many, as in a lot of – thousand dollars. The sewer repairman nodded and said that he did. I should probably apologize, since that does demean what he does. He performs a valuable service. Otherwise we’re right back into pre-Roman times, without plumbing. But the Romans didn’t have fancy cameras that
could snake down the pipes and show you where the roots came in, and the pipes broke, and the 95-year-old infrastructure finally gave way to the shifting moods of the earth. They’d send a slave down.

At least I hope that was a camera picture I saw; it’s possible they just bring a tape deck that shows the same movie to everyone. But I doubt it. The amazing part: the camera sends out a signal that can be read by a hand-held location device. The technician walks around until he gets a fix, and that’s where he drills. So. Fun. Tomorrow they trench. Whether they find something else that will require more expenditures, I don’t know. As I said yesterday, glad we’re having a frugal Christmas.

“That’s what you get for buying an old house!” said my Dad, content in his late-model suburban home in Fargo. Thanks, Dad.

Well, I’d intended more tonight, but a few things intervened: family! Life! Things like “conversation” and “sharing.” Also, had to write a column. It’s now after midnight, and frankly I’m just in the mood to let everything that’s not specifically work related hang fire for a while, but that will come Thursday night. Christmas Eve Eve. I’m still surprised that’s not a holiday in its own right, complete with an animated special and a manufactured mythology. It’s a big gaping marketing niche. Christmas Eve Eve has the momentum of the season with emanations of the penumbra of the Big Day; after Christmas, it’s all crass activity, mall markdowns, leftovers, the bare basement of the tree. At some point the idea of the night before Christmas, or Twasmas, leached the power of the day itself, and for many Christmas Eve is coequal to the main event. If that’s so, give Christmas Eve Eve some love.

As I may have noted, we switched to Christmas Morning present opening, an act of fatherly fiat based in my own experience. Christmas Eve was great, but it made the day itself a strange flat event, and concentrated your excitement on a narrow post-supper window. It was marvelous fun, but there’s something about Christmas Morning, isn’t there? Everyone in their flannels, pancakes, children fizzy with imminent thrills. We go to church on Christmas Eve – always have – and there’s something about the intellectual and emotional state of leaving church at 5:30 and heading home for supper I want to resound for the rest of the evening. But that’s me, a Lutheran Deist. Quietude and awe. Mystery and whiskey. By which I mean: after everyone’s gone to bed, I stay up and wrap presents and watch “A Christmas Carol,” marinate in the ectoplasmic Victoriana, and resolve to throw off the bedsheets like Scrooge himself and exult in the second chance. Every day it should be so. You end every day as an Ebenezer. You begin every day as someone who could, conceivably, toss a coin to an urchin, beseech him to fetch the big goose, and remark on the same daily truth we manage to forget. Oh, it’s not too late. It’s not.

A few more Christmas items – I’m saving all the big hits for tomorrow, including of course the second part of the Christmas Diner. That one may go long.
A card from the 40s, sent by relations. Some day these will be as peculiar as telegrams. I suspect the post office will cease delivery of physical items before people stop sending Christmas cards.
As basic as it gets. Nice font. Scotty-dogs. 1941, says the postmark. But there was another side to 1941, as we’ll see tomorrow. But I’ll leave you with this: I had to call the bank today because the mortgage bill didn’t come in the mail. (We got a new mortgage, haven’t set up direct withdrawal yet.) The nice young lady was nice and helpful, and at the end of the call she wished me a Merry Christmas. First time a stranger in a commercial transaction had done so in years.

Tomorrow: the Christmas men of 1941; charity stamps; cigarette penguins; an enormous Gallery addition; your host as a Christmas card; a Diner. And perhaps a plea. See you then!

Oh, we can do some stamps.
More tomorrow! And man, if that doesn't keep you coming back day after day, nothing will.

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Pass it along, if you wish

**86 RESPONSES TO christmas eve eve**

**Philip Scott Thomas** says:
December 23, 2010 at 1:24 pm

..the night before Christmas, or Twasmas...

That is just genius. Am still chuckling over that one. I am so going to steal it.

**shesnailie** says:
December 23, 2010 at 1:33 pm

_@_v – well the weather outside is frightful... but my shell is so delightful... as long as you're es-car-got... let it snail, let it snail, let it snail...

[Link to image]

**fizzbin** says:
December 23, 2010 at 1:34 pm

Until recently, wishing someone Happy Holidays or Merry Christmas was unremarkable. Due to the deliberate misinterpretation of the intent of the Founders' prohibition on the establishment of a State religion, Merry Christmas became politically incorrect. The war began when people (including me) were told they would be punished for saying Marry Christmas. The push back against secularism seems to be gaining steam, thank God.
And so, may God, the Great Mystery, bless you all.

Tom in Denver says:
December 23, 2010 at 1:34 pm

I just read that a sewage spill has closed Kailua beach (where the Obama's are vacationing). At least he doesn’t have to pay for it. (the vacation and the sewage spill)

I too once had a broken sewer pipe. I had no money so I decided to dig it up and fix it myself. After about 3 days of digging I reached the sewer level and found the broken pipe was under the garage floor. The garage had been expanded at some time in the distant past. I decided to not tear down the garage. I called a contractor friend and a couple of his employees came over with a backhoe on a weekend and quickly re-routed the sewer around the garage. They charged $300. I had to do the restoration of the yard but was happy to do so. I don’t think trenchless technology works on broken pipes that have moved and can’t be roto-rooted.

merry Christmas all.

Patrick says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:01 pm

Growing up, Christmas Eve was where I was allowed to open one, small(ish) present, and Christmas Day saw the rest of them being opened. I remember one year wanting to open the smallest present under the tree, but my parents stopped me, since it was an accessory to another present. It ended up being a charger for an RC car. Some Service Merchandise model, IIRC (oops there goes my age again).

Mr. Manager says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:05 pm

fizzbin:

If you enjoy celebrating Christmas then remember to thank God for our secular government. The only time Christmas has truly been under attack in this country is when the Puritans banded it’s celebration.

Keeping the church out the the government and the government out of the church has been beneficial to both. The (in my opinion good) fact that America has one the highest participation rates in religion is immensely helped by the fact that Americans are religious because they want to be not because they are induced by any government support.

J.Paul says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:12 pm

Funimation Channel (the 24-hour anime network) has been putting up a commercial break ID for the last few days that actually says “Merry Christmas”. I was slightly disappointed that it didn’t also say ?????????? , but it’s an improvement.

J.Paul says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:16 pm
Hmm, katakana doesn't work on the comment page, eh? So much for my clever bilingual observation.

Baby M says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:32 pm

In the midst of a deadly-dull workday, iTunes served up “We Three Kings.” The version from the 1965 Goodyear compilation; Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra with the throttles set at full war emergency power. The phrase “overpowering majesty” comes to mind.

Merry Christmas to all Bleatniks, and to Our Genial Host.

Mark E. Hurling says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:41 pm

Mr. Manager,

The government for the most part is not engaged in this war so no thanks are necessary for having failed to participate. You may be forgetting that the Puritans had only a small part of the real estate of a very few of the original 13 COLONIES in North America which were in point of fact still part of Merrie Olde Englande. It wasn't this country quite yet. The Puritans could only say grace (you should forgive the expression) over parts of New England and even there not all of it. The southern colonies went in for Christmas full bore.

Good attempt at a recovery at the end though. The intent of the operative portions of the Bill Of Rights were to keep government out of religion. Even Ben Franklin (who came closest to in fact being a Deist) believed however, that a democratic government containing a populace without benefit of religious principles could not succeed. Just take a look at well how post-revolutionary France did before Napoleon got them harnessed into a new kind of tyranny.

JamesS says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:41 pm

@J.Paul

The Japanese love Christmas, but to the non-Christian Japanese (most of them) it's a romantic holiday, not unlike Valentine's Day (which they love, too).

Interesting Japanese culture trivia for Natalie (if she doesn't already know this): On Valentine's Day, women give chocolate to men. If it's to a boss or co-worker, it's called giri-choco (obligation chocolate). If to someone they like like, it's honmei-choco (prospective winner chocolate). When female friends give it to each other (did I mention that this tradition was started by chocolate companies?) it's called tomo-choco (friend chocolate).

Chocolate for everybody! Nothing wrong with that.

Dr. Spyn says:
December 23, 2010 at 2:46 pm

Ah the tribulations of an old house. Like some gummer worried about those new-fangled ee-lectronical things, we pay a monthly blackmail, er, insurance fee to the gas company in case the water, gas, or sewer lines decide to cease servicing our 88-year-old house. But, it's never enough. We had a plumber out for an estimate for
some remodeling and he said our waste stack was on its last legs. All it would entail to fix it would be to tear a two-foot opening in all of the walls from the basement to the roof. That's all. I guess we'll wait until human effluvium starts filling the basement before we begin that adventure.

RexV says:
December 23, 2010 at 3:05 pm

The wife's family used to open presents on Christmas Eve but I had to nip that one in the bud after we were married. Christmas Eve is for church, Christmas morning is for Santa. So this year it will be church, dinner with some long-time friends and then after the family has gone to bed, A Christmas Carol (I think I DVR'd the Alistar Sims version) and a couple of bottles of Christmas Ale—likely Anchor Christmas and a Rahr Winter Warmer this year.

bgbear says:
December 23, 2010 at 3:22 pm

The Iranian salesman at the oriental rug place I just bought a rug from wished me a Merry Christmas.

(no I did not get a Persian rug, I am not even “Obama rich”. I bought a nice little Indian made rug).

chrisbcritter says:
December 23, 2010 at 3:44 pm

A friend of mine who does video editing created The Ultimate Christmas Carol – he assembled all the best sequences and musical numbers from nearly every version of the story available, so Scrooge is Alistair Sim one minute, then Mr. Magoo, then George C. Scott, or Rich Little as W.C. Fields, or Reginald Owen, or Jack Palance, or Henry Winkler, or Bill Murray, or Patrick Stewart (“I'm going to... RAISE YOUR SALARY – A-HA!!”). Amazingly it works beautifully which says a lot for the original story as well as my friend's editing prowess.

RLR says:
December 23, 2010 at 4:22 pm

Happy Yule, all!

Gimme that old time religion!

swschrad says:
December 23, 2010 at 4:22 pm

@Dr. Spin: horse hockey! oh, you're going to have to make a bunch of big holes, no question. but not all the way up and down. primarily from the floorboards up to where the sinks/tubs are serviced.

depends on how agile one is, I suppose, and whether or not your DWV stack is old heavy hubbed cast iron.

and depends on whether there is a jog in it anyplace, like (shudder) the folks had.

otherwise, you play with it. cut out the basement section, put a plug on it. open the floor brace's screws so the pipe can slip, cut under
the sanitary tees with a wheelbarrow or porta-dumpster over the capped floor pipe, stand back. cut the pipes going into the sanitary tees, lift them out of the hole.

repeat until injury stops, or the old stack is out to the rafters. remove old expansion section in roof and the last of the old stack, hand it down the attic hatch.

pass up PVC or ABS and fittings, according to local code, cut, glue, replace as needed. join to old feed lines in good condition with rubber sleeve connectors.

that's what the plumber has to do… and it is permit work. if you can find one who will let you assist, it will cut the bill some. if you have a buddy who is a plumber and who can look over your shoulder and cover the permit and inspections, even kewler. not likely the local yokels will let you run the main stack yourself, but you can ask. if so, it's several days to a week of ugly work, plus patches afterwards, “but you know it's done right.”

go google that for the requisite joke, it's pretty good.

madCanada says:
December 23, 2010 at 4:45 pm

@ Mark E Hurling, les Revolutioniers Francaises dans la street etait Catholiques, n’est pas? avec la hungry, la rage, et la crazy? Pas seculares ... hungry, crazy, a la Darfur.

@ Mr Manager. Yes, during England's Interregnum, Christmas was emblematic of all things Anglican, Papist, Arminian and moderate, and the abolition of Christmas emblematic of the new Godly England. Much bootleg wassail was consumed, no doubt, in Cavalier Speakeasies.

And yes, those much-vaunted Massachusetts Pilgrims fled England to escape all that mistletoe. They must have been green with envy when a bit later, Cromwell went ahead & built the very Grinch Utopia they hoped to build at Plymouth Rock. They were even more irked, no doubt, when those darn Anglicans, Papists, Arminians & moderates followed them west and the New World began resembling Whoville. Their defeat was complete, however, when Andy Williams married Claudine Longet and they sang “Silent Night” together.

@ RLR, yes, though I've no aversion to the C-word and say it often, my personal name for the season is “YOOL.” (It was good for the Druids, and it's good enough for me.)

BUT to all friends here, I say a Happy *Christmas* to all. THAT's what we call Dec 25th, and no other day … and it's coming up fast.

Brian Lutz says:
December 23, 2010 at 5:07 pm

In our house, Christmas Eve has always been the day for the big extended family Christmas party which features a number of religious and secular traditions. We do a big white elephant gift exchange on Christmas Eve, and may open a present or two, but most are left until Christmas day. Christmas Day itself is pretty much reserved for immediate family.

Oh, and my Dad has a birthday on Christmas Eve as well…
Pencilpal says:
December 23, 2010 at 5:11 pm

@James S: the Alistair Sim version is the only one for me. Something about it being black/white – wasn’t everything in London black or white then? – and having virtually no soundtrack behind the poignant scenes, makes it very real. And Sim, pranking the chambermaid for a split second after his transformation by madly rumpling his hair – comic delight.

Elf Lover says:
December 23, 2010 at 5:37 pm

James, no picture of the Christmas Elf? It’s become a Yultide ritual for your readers now. And the Yuletide only lasts until… um… well, I’m not sure how long Yuletide lasts. I guess until the moment the Yule hits the curb. But if the Elf doesn’t show up by the 25th, I’m chalking up another win for the other side in the War on Christmas.

Wagner von Drupen-Sachs says:
December 23, 2010 at 5:47 pm

I’m glad I don’t have an old house anymore. Now I have a new house, with polybutylene plumbing & masonite siding! Actually, HAD both of them, cost a mint to replace, did not get in on the class-action action.

God bless us, every one!

bgbear says:
December 23, 2010 at 6:30 pm

Sometime I wish there was a full version of Christmas Carol with Buddy Hacket as Scrooge, Jamie Farr as Bob Cratchit, and Mary Lou Retton as Tiny Tim. Might give Star Wars Christmas a challenge to the bottom.

swschrad says:
December 23, 2010 at 6:31 pm

@Wagner von: if they installed PEX plumbing, you might get in on the next suit 😊 I still have my doubts about plastic pipe and squeeze-it connections, even though all the plumbers are saying “third try is the charm.”

silly Christmas carols time:

Root Canals for Christmas
I’ve had mine, have you?

MJBirch says:
December 23, 2010 at 6:31 pm

madCanada — Grinch Utopia — love it!!!

My vote goes for the Alistair Sim version of Christmas Carol because Sim could make me see the hurt child buried inside the grim miser.

And I get an annual kick out of seeing the charwoman run screaming from his bedroom with the apron over her head (only to flip it up briefly so she could find the door).
Meanwhile, I await the annual catastrophe.

2008 — the refrigerator died on Christmas Eve. Thank the Lord I was not expected to produce a holiday meal, though the foxes out back inherited a banquet some thawed hamburger and some nasty looking rib steaks. I also lost all the soup I had put up that fall. (But the 5-year warranty paid for a new compressor.) That night, I cooked two gigundous chuck roasts. Well, they were thawed out, after all. Waste not, want not. Ate tasty roast beef chunks for weeks. Yum!

2009 — furnace went wacky — thermostat died and I got 85 degree heat regardless of how I worked the dial.

2010 — who knows? Though I did burn up the range hood two weeks ago — grease fire in cast iron pan. I was standing by with the lid, so I smothered the flames quickly. Still, the grease screen in the hood had enough bacon residue to go up most flamboyantly. No damage to anything but the hood. Lucky me. I hope that's my annual catastrophe.

The fun never quits.

**Philip Scott Thomas** says:
December 23, 2010 at 6:49 pm

...there's only about 3 million Lutherans left in the USA. My gf and I looked at each other in shock...

Really? When I left the US 20 years ago there were that many members of the ELCA alone, never mind the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. I wonder what happened.

Mind, that's still about 10% or so of the US population. Isn't it?

**Philip Scott Thomas** says:
December 23, 2010 at 6:56 pm

Oops.

Decimal point error. Make that 1%.

Blame the decidedly fine Speyside malt.

**Russell** says:
December 23, 2010 at 8:17 pm

“Saw a stat on TV that floored me: there's only about 3 million Lutherans left in the USA. My gf and I looked at each other in shock, and I said no wonder the country is going to hell.”

Wonder what the two of you would think of Scotland: In this country of 5 million people, there is ONE Lutheran church, and it boasts about 40 members. . .

**Philip Scott Thomas** says:
December 23, 2010 at 8:25 pm

There is ONE Lutheran church, and it boasts about 40 members

That would be St Columba, in East Kilbride?
**swschrad** says:
December 23, 2010 at 9:08 pm

only three million Lutherans? yah, sure. then. Sven. you be pulling on my leg again, yah.

**Stjohnsmythe** says:
December 23, 2010 at 9:40 pm

So they can't sleeve it… oh, krep. Well, James, I tip my hat to you in gratitude: preserving your treasure of a house now includes the thankless task of restoring or updating the infrastructure that services it. May Jasperwood stand in un tarnished beauty (and unobstructed flushes) for another 100 Christmases!

**John Robinson** says:
December 23, 2010 at 11:42 pm

Regarding the 1946 Christmas stamp: I’m glad to see that even at an early age, Tammy Faye Bakker found modeling work.

**Terry** says:
December 24, 2010 at 1:45 am

I am late to this thread, so I hope that I am not repeating anything that was said before.
On the mainland US, and I imagine, most of Europe, the Romans are too much considered the fathers our American Civilization. I blame this on the neo-classical architecture of the late 18th-19th-early 20th centuries.
In history there has been nothing like America. Might as well compare us to the Chinese.

**Russell** says:
December 24, 2010 at 8:50 am

@ Philip Scott Thomas

East Kilbride it is, though I don’t attend personally. Thought about becoming a Lutheran when I lived in the States, but now am glad I didn't! Wonder what the rest of the Lutherans do here. . .

And save some of that malt for me!!

**Fred** says:
December 31, 2010 at 9:13 pm

Swschrad, I googled “but you know it's done right” and didn't find anything worth chuckling over. In fact your comment above was the second one down (third one once I repeated with the omitted results included…)

**Emily** says:
January 2, 2011 at 5:46 pm

“The nice young lady was nice and helpful, and at the end of the call she wished me a Merry Christmas. First time a stranger in a commercial transaction had done so in years.”

Yet another reminder that the South (I’m a MN transplant now in
Louisiana) is very different. It took me a while to get used to people
telling me to “have a blessed day” as well.
Merry Christmas! It’s a time of giving – specifically, giving the cost of a new car to guys who are quite serious about my root problem. The Roto-Rooter team showed up today, dug a deep grave in the side of the lot, took out the ancient pipe, and discovered that my problems, drain-wise, are “super-bad enormous,” to use the technical term. I got tweets warning me to get a second opinion, but really: Josh, the guy who’s leading this merry endeavor brought...
me outside, bade me to watch the monitor, and fed the camera into the hole. It's just solid root down there.

“You want this?” called a guy from the bottom of the deep rectangular wound in my yard. He held up a thick smelly organic bolus.

“It’s yours,” I said. “I'm regifting it.”

The root-wad was 18 inches long, thick as a wrestler’s forearm. It had been pulled from a six-inch pipe. The old clay pipes of Jasperwood's era had joints every two feet, and roots have penetrated almost every one of them, as far as they can tell. So: they’re going to carve open the street, blast out the pipe, replace it, and reconnect it with the house. As Kevin Murphy, one of the brilliant guys behind MST3K – tweeted, sewer main replacement is the timing belt of home ownership.

“So,” I said with a leaden tongue as I looked over the paperwork, “do you see this a lot?”

“Every day,” Josh said. “Minneapolis pipes are garbage.” He smiled, apologetically, as if offense had been given. “That's my term. They're all old. We're doing this all the time.” He has the demeanor of someone who has to break a lot of bad news.

I suppose I shouldn't do this now. It's the worst possible time, since everyone's tapped, but then again, hey, it's Christmas! Gimme gimme! Actually, I don't subscribe the idea of Christmas as an orgy of selfish accumulation. I don't know a single adult who anticipates what they will get. With a few exceptions we're all parents, and it's all about the wee bairns. My dad doesn't want anything. Told him I'd get someone a goat in another country through the Heifer project, and that's fine with him. So I don't need anything and other people in distant lands would really, really like a goat.

That said, it's time for the annual fundraiser. It will stretch a month or so. This one is different than last year; there are different levels of sponsorship, with extra goodies. But the basic idea is still the same – chip in a buck, and you'll get Bleatplus. (Eventually, in some cases, for which I am still feeling abashed. I am but one man.)

Anyway: SO IT BEGINS. Here's the page with the details, including a little video by your host.

A few Christmas advertising details of note:
There's something about these guys revealing that they're really Santa that unnerves me. It's like they've been fooling us all along. I don't appreciate it. Then there's Blatant Santa, Merry Nicotine Fiend-Enabler:

Wonder if any of these boxes still exist:
Continuing our stamps: We'll repeat 1946, where wide-eyed urchins are trusted with open flames:

Stylized dove says goodbye to the 40s, which had certainly kept everyone's attention.
GREETINGS! WIDE-EYE SPUNITKY GIRLS SAYS GREETINGS! YOUR FLY IS DOWN!

The Festival of St. Longeshadoe is well and truly underway:

It's funny when he thinks I'm kidding about getting off the sled because it's killing my back:
Jingle Pixie's girlfriend greets you with happy thoughts of beating the T in NTA. Which we did. For a while.

A photo from my grandparents' farmhouse. Christmas, and the menfolk are listening to the radio.

If you're wondering why everyone looks so serious: it's 1941.
From the cold, cold stones of that fireplace in my childhood home: a very earnest nerdy Christmas. This would be 4th grade. That was my dog. For some reason I think it had a vague association with Tennessee Ernie Ford, but I can't quite say what it is. It's yoked evermore to that name, perhaps due to a filing error in my memory banks.
Diner! The second part of the Christmas Diner. Here's one version; here's the MP3. I do love doing these. Had no idea where it was going, which made the ending all the more enjoyable. As you can tell, I'm not kidding about weekly Diners – but they'll be a bit shorter in 2011.

Someone tell me why I do this. Sometimes I wonder. Perhaps because the Diner has been my fictional construct for so long, since the Minnesota Daily column days. Maybe I'm stuck in that old 2005 "podcasts are cool" vogue. Maybe I'm trying to make something that will end up on archive.org in 100 years when someone googles my name. Maybe it's because people say they like it. I don't know. But in my head I know exactly what the Diner looks like, inside and out. I always have. If I didn't go there in podcasts, I'd go there in my dreams, and who knows what would happen then.

A plethora of ads in the Gallery of Regrettable Food advertising section; they're not all amusing, but are presented as interesting historical artifacts.
Not to repeat the whole “fundraiser” thing, but heck, that’s some stuff, eh? Make sure you watch the video, where the “no one put a gun to my head” issue is fully addressed. And now, having made a plea, it’s time to take a long hiatus! No. Not at all. I’ll be back next week, and after that, a rare series of Bleats from the road. So we’re still a week away from the thank-you page where I bow in deep respect to honor your patronage.

See you Monday, with the usual assortment of things. Kiss the kids and pet the pets, enjoy your traditional holiday delights, sing the songs, rip the paper, light the fire, hoist the nog. Merry Christmas, everyone!

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Pass it along, if you wish

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45 RESPONSES TO christmas eve 2010

Terry says:
December 24, 2010 at 2:25 am
Merry Christmas from Hawaii, James!
And suspect the contractors. Looks like the “Brazilian Psychic Surgery” to me.

Kerry Potenza says:
December 24, 2010 at 6:41 am
Well, the timing of your fundraiser is fitting, in light of this current predicament in which you find yourself. Hopefully, your pleas will generate many donations. My sympathies to you over your clogged pipes, and hopefully, the situation will be resolved and not drag on a la the OIWF. I have contributed $50, a bargain IMO, and wish I could do more.

This Christmas will be bittersweet for me, as my mother is hospiced and it will most likely her last. She is not in pain and is cheerful (she has Alzheimer's), but it's hard. We have always had her here with us and will miss her presence at the festivities at my house. We will visit her today and bring presents, but it's just not the same.

I am in the sandwich generation. My mother is almost 86 and my daughter is almost 8. Life goes on. I have a letter from Santa to type. My daughter wrote a letter to Santa a while back with some VERY important questions, and has been inquiring about his lack of reply.

Merry Christmas, and thank you for my early morning entertainment. I look forward to my coffee and Bleat every day. I truly hope that people go all “It's a Wonderful Life” on you, James, and donate like crazy to the “richest” man in town. That is my Christmas wish for you. You have given so much of your time to us.

Happy Everything to Bleat nation.

Natalie says:
December 24, 2010 at 7:13 am
@Kerry – We were there a couple of years ago with my Grandmother. Trust me, she’ll always be at the Christmases. It still
feels as if Grandma is there, somewhere in the house, coffee in hand and watching everyone open gifts.

And, she’ll be there this year, too.

Cold Fury » Merry Christmas to all... says:
December 24, 2010 at 7:22 am

[…] Anyways, as I'm sure you'll all agree, I ran across the perfect one for this webstyx. Eat your heart out, James. Aw, who am I kidding, he probably has a copy of the original on microfiche. The esteemed Meestah [...] 

Nancy says:
December 24, 2010 at 8:24 am

Merry Christmas James and family. I'll be tipping in the New Year. I am amazed they can even break into the ground in Minnesota in December.

CGHill says:
December 24, 2010 at 8:30 am

For what it's worth, the vintage-1948 line at my place was rendered utterly worthless before the end of the 1990s, and has been replaced by nice, impenetrable PVC all down the line.

Except where the line actually comes into the house, where an old joint was left intact. The roots actually came looking for it.

RJ says:
December 24, 2010 at 9:15 am

I feel for ya; last spring I got to spend the equivalent of a small car having my foundation re-sealed and a new drainage system installed.

On one level you know it's necessary, but I cannot escape the comparison of how many more pleasurable ways I could have spent that dough.

Anyway, James, thank you for all the terrific writing you produce. I like starting the day with the Bleat.

Moishe3rd says:
December 24, 2010 at 9:25 am

Merry Christmas! And, Ouch! As a contractor, I can indeed, feel your pain.
But – 'tis the Night Before Shabbos and All Through the Land, there are many, many roofs where Ice will be Damned...
As with our host’s super enormous root problem; people are having super enormous Roof Snow and, specifically, Ice Dam problems here in our little neck of Minnesota.
I feex these things.
As I wrote last week – regarding what a blessing that Super Enormous snowstorm was for demonstrating the sterling qualities of our little Jewish community here in St Louis Park, so I believe that G-d also engendered these super enormous Ice Dams as a result of that Super Enormous snowstorm just to enable me to pay for my daughter's wedding in a couple of months.
Life is, indeed, Beautiful All the Time.

**Julia** says:
December 24, 2010 at 9:29 am

So sorry about your sewer pipe woes. Dooce went through something similar a few years ago.

That Joan Crawford drawing that is the first image at top creeps me out. Hope it will change soon.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your family. Best wishes for a bright 2011.

**Grayhackle** says:
December 24, 2010 at 9:31 am

Sorry about the root problem, James. Had to do it a few years ago. It is indeed like hundred dollar bills sweeping away in the great sewage flow from the city. Had to use roto-rooter every year and finally hit the bullet and had the line replaced. We had two in college at the time and times sure were lean.

On another note, I am sending a donation the old fashioned way. Paypal won’t let me create an account since I had one several years ago. They have my email and I can’t remember the password.

**bgbear** says:
December 24, 2010 at 9:48 am

Why don’t you go to Sam Wainwright and ask him for the money?

Why don’t you go to the riff-raff you love so much?

**Patrick** says:
December 24, 2010 at 9:56 am

Merry Christmas to all Bleatniks far and wide, and to the Lileks family, many cleared and repaired pipes for the new year.

We had similar plumbing woes a year ago. All the drains were backing up, as were the toilets. Turned out the pipes that ran to our house were also connected to the duplex next door. Over the last few years, the duplex had seen many a tenant come and go, and some of them with little kids. Being ever-so-curious, as little kids often are, never allow them near the toilets in your home, especially if they happen to have small toys, those which can quite easily fit down the drain of a toilet, in their hands.

Parents had to call Mr. Rooter, the Hydrex to Roto-Rooter's Oreo, to come out. They had to dig up our part of the property line, then realized the pipe goes into the other property. Parents called the owner of the duplex, and he came over to oversee some of the pipe digging as well. The tenant at the time apologized for the mess, and agreed to help pay for it, as did the owner.

I remember seeing on TLC or HGTV that Canadian fix-it show, Holmes on Homes. For anyone who's never seen it, the show stars Mike Holmes, a contractor, who goes to people's homes and fixes up problems left behind by other contractors, the original builder, or due to age. I remember there was an episode where the owners had plumbing problems, and he found the house still had the old clay pipes connected from the sewer main to the house. Those had
cracked and busted over the years, due to the Earth settling, and all had to be replaced.

Next to clay pipes, the worst material for plumbing would have to be polybutylene. It was (although some homes may still have it) a cheap, blue (often referred to as “poly-blue”) plasticky-rubbery pipe used as the water main lines running to one's home. The problem with poly-blue is that is will crack or bust within a few short years. You could just look at it, and it will bust. My grandma had it happen to her when I was living with her. We didn’t know about it until a neighbor came up, because our water was running into her yard. I walked down to look, and sure enough we had the fountains at the Bellagio. Grandma had to call a local plumbing company, and to the tune of a year at Yale, they had to replace the entire pipe. It wasn’t a short length, either: It was probably a good 1 to 2,000 feet.

RLR says:
December 24, 2010 at 10:06 am

I feel for your sewage woes, same thing happened to us twice (1: septic pump croaked, new replacement didn't work, after long expensive diagnosis finally had to rewire it and buy up to a 240VAC pump; 2: I cut through our septic leach field so spent the small-car amount on a new lateral to the city sewer; at least it was an option).

I'm sure that I'm in the minority, but I really can't stand web content at fixed 1x real-time. That means I am no fan of newly-produced web video or audio. Tried a couple of Diners a few years ago and it ain’t my ‘druther. Don’t get me started on “web” news outlets that just regurgitate video clips.

But the lure of new Joe Ohio draws me to the donation page... now THAT’S content with some hair on it.

Jennifer says:
December 24, 2010 at 10:06 am

Merry Christmas James. I feel for you regarding the pipes. Hope it goes smoothly. Heifer international is one of my favorite charities. I love choosing from the different beasties.
Jen

Rat says:
December 24, 2010 at 10:57 am

Merry Christmas, and my condolences to your sewer pipes. I just happily made my contribution toward another year of BleatPlus, and I’m looking forward to another great year of kitsch and ephemera!

Julie says:
December 24, 2010 at 11:20 am

Ah, yes. Our 40 year-old piece of — excuse me, “charmingly retro” home had the blue stuff for sewer pipe. The whole system backed up our first full day in the house. The home warranty didn’t cover it because the problem was about ten feet away from the house proper.

We replaced a section of the pipe and put in our own clean out tap, which kept us limping along for a few years before we finally bit the
financial bullet and had the pipe replaced. That was another disaster. Oh, the joys of home ownership.

chrisbcritter says:
December 24, 2010 at 11:46 am

Plumbing? Ugh. My boss has building in West L.A. that has to get root-blasted every fall. Worst part is most of the roots are in the lateral that runs from the building line to the main sewer line; that lateral is owned by the city and hasn't been replaced since 1928, but we keep getting stuck for their bill.

The Joan Crawford pic? I don't mind it. My boss's uncle Pete knew Christopher Crawford as a kid and was invited to a birthday party at their home. Pete was always into plumbing and utilities even when he was little, so he asked Joan if she had a basement. She said words to the effect of, "I'm a movie star. I have two basements!" Pete wanted to go look at the plumbing, but Joan demurred...

Al Federber says:
December 24, 2010 at 11:47 am

Having your sewer line replaced is a very good thing.

Wagner von Drupen- Sachs says:
December 24, 2010 at 11:49 am

Came home one day to find a pitchers' mound in the middle of the front lawn. Hmm, that wasn't there before... Stepped on it, and it popped like a big zit. Fortunately I had the whatnots to effect a temporary splice.

A nice side effect of the main polybutylene supply busting, was that it filled the septic tank and saturated the drainage field. But it made the ground nice and soft for digging it all up.

Most of the neighbors had either had the same problem recently, or were soon to have it.

As much as I complained about my old 1930's era home, it was built a lot better than my 1980's one.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
December 24, 2010 at 11:57 am

In the "Gallery of Regrettable Food", the milk add is wrong on so many levels. Hemo? Were they serious? It is also probably a good thing they framed the picture the way they did. 'nuff said.

Price says:
December 24, 2010 at 12:37 pm

And a Merry Christmas to you, Mr. Lileks. Thanks for another year of the Bleat.

swschrad says:
December 24, 2010 at 12:48 pm

root penetration of a drain line starts with a little cell-wide tendril, thirstily seeking water. as it grows into a water source, more cells form from reproduction. the rootlet eventually differentiates into
phylum cells in the center, bringing water into the plant.

these little tendrils will break anything. roots claw up mountain basalt and granite into rock, into chips, into soil. greedy, grabbing trees fighting for life as they grow, shattering all they come across underground as they gasp in the summer heat.

broken drains are a nature tax for shade, just as warty red skin is a nature tax by the mosquito for a pail full of ripe wild berries.

this is why all fertile areas of the earth have plants, and none have stucco houses with water and sewer service and cable TV or satellite as a natural cap.

this Nature Minute has been brought to you by The Santa Myth.
hurry, four hours until The Santa Myth closes for the year and the sleigh starts, grab all your working credit cards and slide sideways through the snow! free rapping in the lobby, and we might tie up your gifts, too.

Merry Christmas to many, and Happy Holidays to the rest.

**Captain Ned** says:
December 24, 2010 at 1:18 pm

Replaced my septic system a few years ago, so fully understand the pain. At least yours should be a one & done. Septic systems, unfortunately, will always need to be replaced at some point, and I don't foresee town sewer here anytime soon.

I've dealt with the poly-blue stuff, but my old septic system used the tarpaper pipe stuff. I find bits of it sticking out of odd spots on the side hill and wonder what I'd find if I turned the back yard into a full archaeological dig site. Then sanity takes over and reminds me that what lies buried need not be reported to the town.

**shesnailie** says:
December 24, 2010 at 1:55 pm

_@_v – have a very merry crimble and a gear new year…

**Seattle Dave** says:
December 24, 2010 at 2:25 pm

Merry Christmas, James, and thanks for the enjoyment we all get from your work. I hope you, Mrs. Lileks, and Natalie have a wonderful Christmas and a very happy New Year.

All the best of the season to all the other Bleatniks, too.

**Seattle Dave** says:
December 24, 2010 at 2:26 pm

Oh, and Jasper Dog too, of course!

**chrisbcritter** says:
December 24, 2010 at 3:20 pm

With all my griping about L.A. infrastructure and Pete not getting to check out Joan Crawford's plumbing, I forgot to mention: Merry Christmas to James and family, and to my fellow Bleatniks as well (those who are into that sort of thing)!
Shh... did I hear sleighbells? Listen...
Tink... tink... tink...

swschrad says:
December 24, 2010 at 3:28 pm

@Patrick: mike holmes. oh. woe he to you if you have to contact mike holmes. he comes out to check on a leaky toilet and ends up restructuring the whole side of a house, all the wiring is fence wire wrapped around matchboxes behind the wall, and a merry drift of asbestos is at the bottom of every through-drilled heating duct.

a cracked window left by a creepy contractor who didn’t paint turns out to be a $160,000 job. thank goodness HGTV and the fine sponsors of windows, flooring, tile underlayment, and other geegaws are behind all the folks carrying yellow and black tools.

mike has turned a vendetta against sloppy inspections and criminally inept contractors into one helluva business. his website is a one-stop shopping center by now.

but you know, he earned his way there, and it's educational. canada's finest current export.

JamesO says:
December 24, 2010 at 4:14 pm

You could peddle that photo as “Dr. Zachary Smith: Age 10″ at the SF&F collectables shows.

swschrad says:
December 24, 2010 at 4:56 pm

ho-ho-ho, the triellt 260 I ordered off eBay has arrived, I can start reconnecting power supplies in the s/l christmas day.

nothing I had (working) could measure the B++ of 1600 volts, since the Beckman meter died of display failure.

Santa’s tips... B+ voltages over 650 don't behave. don't trust meter leads or cases. lay extra insulation of several thousand volts worth underneath test leads. do not touch anything near the B++. use an external line switch to bring up the unit under test. if you have voltage over several thousand, like to a kilowatt cage, shield your presence in case things blow up. ain't a bad idea to make the initial tests with a 200-watt incandescent bulb in series with your equipment.

batteries not included, requires external connections, extra cost membership required, yo’ momma, my lawyer's hungry, etc. etc. etc.

Daniel says:
December 24, 2010 at 6:14 pm

Oh James. Sorry about the sewer. This holiday will come to be remembered as The Sewer Pipe Christmas. Our family once had The Halloween The Toilet Tank Broke, and there was The Thanksgiving The Water Main Busted. Makes us smile now. Don't know why.
Blessings to you and yours, and Merry Christmas!
Stephanie says:
December 24, 2010 at 6:24 pm

I peeked at the donation video last week when the staggering Mickey doll video was up, and it reminded me then to kick in a bit while I was taking care of my other annual donations. Totally worth it, I get such entertainment from this site. Sometimes life gets too busy and I'm away for a while, but it's always here when I need a chuckle, and I appreciate that. I'm so happy to see the return of the diner, I've really missed those. I don't think of them as podcasts so much as a little old-time radio story with a twist, and for some reason I always find them surprising and a bit delightful. Happy holidays to you and yours!

Bob Lipton says:
December 24, 2010 at 6:58 pm

May your days be merry and sewage-free.

You know, when I first looked at that 'Kools' penguin, the bent flipper looked like a rifle stock and the cigarette like a rifle barrel, So here's this penguin packing heat and a cartoon of cigarette, disguising himself as Santa Claus to allay our suspicions.....

Bob

HelloBall says:
December 24, 2010 at 7:32 pm

“To the trap in the line, in the room down the hall, now flush away, flush away, flush away all!”

Best wishes for a very Merry Christmas to you and your loved ones, James, and to all the Bleatniks at sea.

DonH says:
December 24, 2010 at 8:18 pm

I love the Diner. By far the most entertaining thing I have ever heard. Ive over-indulged tonight and seem to have forgotten the name of the mush-mouthed fellow who sang about the nuclear Christmas. Stanley something or other. I'd love to play that song tomorrow during the Christmas party. It was so dreadful. It would be a hoot.

cnyguy says:
December 24, 2010 at 8:57 pm

A very Merry Christmas to the Lileks family, and to all my fellow Bleatniks.

Pieter DeVries says:
December 24, 2010 at 10:27 pm

To all the Lileks clan, a very Merry Christmas and wonderful New Year.

Andy says:
December 24, 2010 at 11:24 pm
James—for all the years of enjoyment, given for free, I am happy to
donate. Your writing is such a great way to start my day—it gives me
a reason to look forward to going to work. To you and all those who
follow this site, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Aleta says:
December 25, 2010 at 8:10 pm

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Thanks for all your posts
and ramblings and stuff. Your PayPal account should look a bit
larger shortly. 😊

Paul in NJ says:
December 26, 2010 at 12:01 am

Yeah, a lot of us knew the Bleatplus cat was out of the bag after
watching the Mickey Dance Malfunction. And as soon as I dig out
from under the pile of wrapping paper, I’ll cheerfully toss some coin
into the PayPal account.

Where else do you get more than your money’s worth these days?
From the government? I don’t think so!

And Merry Christmas (it still is where you are) and Happy
Upcoming New Year!

kc says:
December 26, 2010 at 6:23 am

Thank you for everything, James. Thanks for being a good dad, and
thanks to your wife for letting us have so much of you. Merry
Christmas to all of you, your dad, the friends and family you’ve
introduced to us, and of course to all the Bleatniks, near and far.

Family Christmas is today, I think I feel better, time to prep the
turkey!

God Bless Us Every One!

swschrad says:
December 26, 2010 at 3:20 pm

ya sold me, I’m sending something to the last couple contributors to
the “sealing wax” entry on Wikipedia!

how will future generations know what Puff, the Magic Dragon
jonesed for if I don’t?

what a fine public service.

lohwoman says:
December 27, 2010 at 11:14 am

James: Thanks for posting that photo of the listening audience. Been
goin thru photos with my dad this year and the ones related to
WWI (his father, US Army Field Artillery) and WWII (my father, US
Army Field Artillery) were especially meaningful to me. The Bleat is
my before-work read and then I read the comments at night. Two
for the price of one! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all
(Helloball!) and Welcome Back, Joe Ohio!
Kenneth Pybus says:
December 30, 2010 at 7:02 pm

You ask why you do the Diner. The family listened to several holiday Diners on our drive this week from West Texas to the slopes in Colorado and back. Now my 11-year-old daughter wants to play them while she does her chores around the house. I do have to hope she doesn’t get all the references...

epobirs says:
December 31, 2010 at 5:16 am

I’m relieved I’m not the only one whose first thought upon seeing that photo was “Young Dr. Smith.”
You know, Jingle Pixie has become a member of the Christmas Family now. Mostly because he appears to be less psychotic after the holiday has passed. I put him on a window sill, and he actually seems rather friendly. But for the last week he has been showing up here and there, as my daughter and I hide him in places where he’s least expected. (I taped him leaning over the rim of the toilet last night.) Not that anyone over-indulged. It was a fine Christmas dinner: foie gras, courtesy of French brother-in-law. Daughter was suspicious: what’s that?

“Chicken cheese,” I said. She loved it. Bro-in-law also brought a 1999 wine in which he was deeply disappointed. Its time had come and gone. All I could provide for a backup was some Rawson’s Retreat, which we ran through our newfangled wine aerator. It’s all the rage. Don’t you know. People swear by
And how was yours? | The Bleat.

them. It does something to the wine that makes it pop, somehow. Later in the evening I gave him a taste of the Marker’s Mark 46, poured around a bourbon ball, and he did so much swirling and sniffing I nearly went full Cramden on him: WILL YOU JUST DRINK IT NORTON. His mother was also here, all the way from France itself, or herself. She speaks no English, but I know a tiny bit of French, so I could pick up something about Sarkozy and Italy and sickness, and I thought she was talking about the Euro or riots. Turns out she was complaining how Carla Bruni makes Sarko wear Italian suits that make him look like a gangster. The word “Napoleon” came up often, with a face of distaste.

It was a grand evening and a marvelous Christmas, and I hope you had the same. Looked like this.

One irritating moment: We went to church on Christmas eve, but didn’t do the 4:30 session, also known as the get-it-over-with-before-dinner episode. There’s always a million people; there’s usually a traffic cop outside. But there are also shows at 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, so we went at 8. Sat in the balcony; had a tremendous view. The music was as good as ever, but the people behind us kept talking. Teens mostly. I wanted to turn around and say
“shouldn’t you be texting someone?” but confined myself to a few conspicuous head-turns in the hopes that the maternal authority figure would shush her offspring, but she started chattering as well.

And so you are forced to love your neighbor in spite of himself and craft a cutting remark you might say on the way out to your own family, hoping they will overhear and wonder if it’s directed towards them, even though people like that never do. You’d have to be looking them straight in the eye and start out with “Next time, pal,” or “listen, bub,” or some such indication that verbal confrontation has been initiated.

**Not to rehash** the whole Christmas, because it’s really one of those things people are well and truly finished with by the 26th, and hearing about someone else’s Christmas is like hearing about someone else’s tropical vacation, but I did go shopping on Christmas Eve as I said in my column. Loved it. Everything is winding down, but there’s still hustle. Also bustle. You’re in a mood to stroll and whistle and perhaps pick up some chocolates and whooooaaa, you’re suddenly feeling like you’re going to pass out. Oh: right. Got up after 5 hours of sleep because the sewer repairmen started early. I got the vapors at the Everything’s a Dollar Except When It’s Not Which Is Surprisingly Common Given Our Name Store, where the proprietor – a fellow from the Indian subcontinent – was wishing everyone a Merry Christmas, and getting the same in return, and beaming wide every time someone said it.

Couldn’t find a stocking stuffer for my daughter at the Dollar Store. She’s at that age. Tweeted it. Got a reply: *go to Michael’s, they have lots of stocking stuffers*. So I drove over to Michaels, which is in the saddest big-box shopping area around. Used to be Circuit City Plaza, but, well, you know. Office Max had a huge store: died. Cost Plus World Market (“Crap you’d get on a Mexican vacation, plus chairs and wine”) closed. Staples filled the space vacated by Office Max, but there’s an enormous vacant store left by the death of CompUSA, which expired years ago. Used to go there all the time with the Giant Swede, when we’d go out for coffee. Swing by, look at the new machines, check out the software. Games! So many games! Walls of games! Then the honchos, probably the head honchos, thought: what are we doing, emphasizing software? Let’s sell music and televisions.

Because when people think “television” they think “computer store.” Let’s not go to the enormous Best Buy to see what they have, let’s go to computer store. They’ll have store-brand TVs with weird features like built-in VHS players! And hey, maybe some of those “compact discs” that are sweeping the nation. So people stopped going there for the COMP part, and the entire chain died. Also, nothing ever had a price tag. I’m serious. Just numbers. The staff said it was because they were always adjusting the prices, and that was probably the case, but remember: this was before everyone had a tiny computer in their pocket connected to a global information retrieval system. If someone else had the item slightly cheaper, well, what the heck, what’s a dollar, you’re here now.
One more thing: this store, devoted to the miracles of high-tech, stuffed to the rafters with computers, processed credit cards with addressographs. That's right. They took a physical imprint of your card. I'm surprised they didn't have a card that gave you a free Indulgence after you'd purchased ten.

Anyway, I went to Michaels, where I never go, because I do not scrapbook and do not pierce the stems of silk flowers into blocks of light, porous foam. They have art supplies, though, and it suddenly struck me that my daughter needs some proper pencils. So I got her good pencils. All the other gifts will retreat into the dim misty memories of happy warm childhood Christmases, but maybe the pencils will be remembered. They're the color of foxes and lions and dogs, and they're soft, so she can shade them with her thumb, as is her style.

As for the dog, he had the best Christmas ever -- prime rib, op cit. He also got to lick the plate on which the foie gras had been served, and that was like . . . dog meth.

So that was Christmas. The day after I went to the hardware store, because I needed something to anchor the pneumatic door closer -- the wind ripped it out of the frame again -- and I needed something that would keep the ancient 1915 original door knob from coming off in my hands. In short, I needed a rod and a long screw. It is a testament to the clerks at the store that they just nod and say “okay, great,” but I suppose the infantile entendres are old hat. I went to another hardware store for larger items, and huzzah: peanuts on sale for 1.99, usually $3.49 at the grocery store. I bought six containers, and left the store in a happy mood that died as I crossed the lot. Sunset, cold, snow, slush, asphalt vacancy, the same damned same old damned same old, and I'm happy over peanuts.

Augh. Well. Target was next. Packed. All the ornament vultures come to pick the bones of Father Christmas. Parked at the arse-end of the lot, next to a rusty white car that contained a fellow sitting in the front seat, finishing a cigarette. He got out of his vehicle when I did. He moved slow, as if trailing Marley's Gifts That Had To Be Returned Without a Receipt. I was in Target for 45 minutes. When I got back to my car he was just getting into his; he had a tiny plastic bag. How did you spend 45 minutes in Target and end up with one plastic bag? I wanted to ask. I have six bags and a general irritation with humanity's inability to realize they are blocking the aisle because they have no awareness of their surroundings, and the impact of cart placement on the fluidity of aisle traffic. You have one bag.

He got in his car and lit a cigarette and sat there smoking his cigarette.

The day after Christmas will do that to a fellow, perhaps. It's over but it still goes on. Now it's markdowns and clearances and indistinct holiday greetings and the end of the year and noisemakers and fargin' party hats and then the great howling vacancy of January. Seriously: two days ago all this snow was MAGICAL! Today I'm backing out of the driveway, and I realize I have two enormous snowbanks eight feet tall, and I can't see if anyone's coming up or
down the street, so I go in reverse like a blind drunk with a vial of nitro around his neck. The only thing worse than thinking “four more months of this” is realizing how today will seem like just-the-other-day when the curbs reappear and the birds tweet and the world revs up again. You spend your youth wishing Time would speed up; the grim joke comes when Time gets around to granting your request, and by then you want it to slow down. Make up your mind, Time says. But that’s what it always says. That’s all it says.

Well, there are compensations. These peanuts are excellent, for one thing.

Hey! New Matchbook.

And if you missed it on Friday: it’s another Fundaraiser, with lovely prizes. Now with babbling video! Get used to me shilling for this thing through January. Downside: naked begging. Upside: a year’s worth of quality Joe Ohio stories for fifty cents a week, and 30 weeks of Bleatplus folderol? More here. Thanks for your patronage and patience. And wish me luck: tomorrow I learn if the pipe-replacement strategy works. Plan C apparently involves buckets and a house in the back yard with a crescent moon on the door.

See you around. If tumblr is kind, Lint starts up again today. If tumblr is down, I’m heading elsewhere.

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55 RESPONSES TO and how was yours?

Mark E. Hurling says:
December 27, 2010 at 9:21 pm

@Bob Lipton; you said wang. Huh-huh, huh-huh.

Elf..er..JinglePixieLover says:
December 27, 2010 at 9:36 pm

Thanks, James…and Happy New Year!

juanito - John Davey says:
December 28, 2010 at 12:09 am

Bob Lipton says:
December 27, 2010 at 9:16 pm

And my line is to explain that the minister is making too much noise for me to hear them, could they please speak up.

That is my favorite response when several folks in a group I am attempting to communicate with are blathering on, interrupting me. Learned it from my Trig 2 teacher, a retired Air Force Col. “I'm sorry I couldn't hear you, I was talking”.

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8572
And how was yours? | The Bleat.

Kev says:
December 28, 2010 at 10:33 am

What I never understood was who, exactly, was the target market for the new version of CC. They got rid of appliances, had a disastrous layout of CDs and DVDs, lousy prices, and sales people who didn’t know much of anything. What on earth were they thinking?

Originally, Circuit City had a pretty decent CD selection (and I don’t get to say that often, being a jazz fan). But when they finally opened up in my suburb (a mixture of upscale and downscale neighborhoods), the contents of their CD rack seemed to imply that the corporate higher-ups thought everyone in my area spoke only Spanish.

My dear husband spends an inordinate amount of time in the local Best Buy and probably DOES know the layout of the store better than many of the staff. In fact, one day he went in wearing a golf shirt the same shade of blue as the corporate uni and found himself directing customers to the parts of the store they sought.

I used to work at a music store whose corporate polo shirts were blue, but a much darker blue than BB (and with our store’s logo on it as well), but that didn’t keep people from asking me where to find things. Never went there on break again, and that’s also the reason I won’t wear my red polo if I’m going to be shopping at Super Target that day.

pixie_fla says:
December 28, 2010 at 4:25 pm

Remaining morsels of foie gras (to be licked off the platter) = “dog meth” I love it!
And how was yours? | The Bleat.

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?
Oh the humanity | The Bleat.

Yes, we have some snow.

RECENT COMMENTS

polymathamy on 06.14.12 Bleat
Amanda from Michigan on Boo. Hiss
Julie on Testing the new RSS feed idea
shesnailie on Autobots and Bruckner
Wagner von Drupen- Sachs on Autobots and Bruckner

140 OR SO
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CLICK – AND SAVE!

A BOOK I RECOMMEND

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8579
It took down the gazebo. The gazebo that provided so much Twitter-based amusement two years ago. It was Gazebo #3; the first succumbed to age and rot, the second was a pitiful insubstantial thing that blew away in the slightest breeze. The third, I figured, would last for the age, but – well. If you’re wondering why I didn’t take the top off before the snow, well, MYOB. No, that's wrong. By this point in blogging and other forms of internet exhibitionism, MB is EB, I guess. I couldn't get the top off. The only way to get it off would have been to rip it off. I figured as long as I knocked off the snow I’d be fine, but the blizzard came and froze, and that was that. When I saw it ruined today my heart went into my throat, thinking the dog was beneath it when it fell. No. Whew. But a chair was lost. That was the disaster at the end of the waning day.

The day began with slight tremors through the house and the CANK CANK CANK CANK of an enormous machine punching a hole in the street outside on my behalf. Still not certain whether the Ruinous Drain Replacement project is successful or not. I do know they’ve ripped up an enormous portion of the yard and disassembled the retaining wall, which means it’ll be
breached until the spring, just as the pile of twisted steel will be out there until spring. But it's Minnesota; people understand these things. My neighbor had a hole in his roof and much water was dumped into his kitchen. It happens with old houses. That's why we love them. Until we sell them and move away to live in a place that was built five years ago, and seems so much nicer, until one day you stumble and hit the wall and your head goes right through. I'll say this for Jasperwood: it's solid.

And cold. But it's cold everywhere. There's so much snow I have to back out of the driveway with exquisite care, because I cannot see cars coming anymore, so high are the drifts. Today when I got to work the wind was blowing across the parking lot, tossing up frigid grit; the sun shone bright, but it was that indifferent winter sun that might as well be the countenance of Caesar watching a gladiatorial combat. I had the thought we all have up here in our dark moments: what am I doing here? Why did anyone stay here after they'd experienced this? Of course, we are an industrious species, adaptable and crafty, and the early settlers figured the opportunities for money and freedom outweighed the five-month block of ice in which they would make their home, but that does not explain the Eskimos.

As we were all taught in grade school, the Eskimos came across the land bridge from Russia, which broke once they were across, and then they settled down and built igloos, invented 37 words for snow, made parkas with fur around the face, and fished. the teacher would note that some continued to go south, and eventually populated the rest of the Americas, where they spent their time raising Maize and not inventing the wheel, hanging around wearing loincloths, and playing a game that involved putting a rubber ball through a stone circle. They also invented chocolate. Then the Spanish came, and -

Hold on, Teacher, why didn't the Eskimos keep moving south?

We don't know.

But why would anyone stay there? Especially when the rest of the guys are moving on?

We don't know.

So the Eskimos are sitting in snow up to their eyebrows, and some guys say “hey, we're going to keep moving, because this sucks,” and the Eskimos stay because they think it can't possibly get any better?

We don't know.

Why didn't the other guys send word back after they got to Texas? That would have been the neighborly thing to do. Hey, Eskimos, It's warmer down here. You'll love it. There's parts that are snowy half the year, then parts that are cold only a little bit, then parts where it's never really cold, then it all happens again in reverse until you get to another snowy place with these awesome little birds that have a certain comic dignity we can't quite express using the pictographic form of communication, but Xhixhuxhtual – that's the
guy with the message – he can imitate them for you. It’s hilarious. Anyway, come on down! We have an awesome civilization down here with hot food and plants that make you see things and the girls aren’t wearing six bear-skins, if you know what we mean. XXOO (that’s pronounced shu-shu-ah-ah) yr MesoAmerican cousins.

But no one did. It’s possible the Eskimos didn’t believe them. C’mon, Dude, look at this tan. This happens to you when you don’t wear animal suits all day. You can actually feel the sun on your skin. At first we thought it was spirits or ancestors, and they were crying, but it turns out it’s called “sweat.” Oh c’mon. At least send a few menfolk down, okay?

So they did, and the young men never returned, because they had discovered chili peppers and agave juice and the eternal splosh of the laving waves, and they never went back to tell the Eskimos.

That’s one theory.

**The modern world:** child was complaining today because the Kinecx wasn’t responding to voice commands. When I was growing up, three thing responded to voice commands: people, dogs, and the computers on Star Trek. Now she has a device that does something when she calls its name. Yes, this was her Christmas present. On Christmas Eve I went to Best Buy, wandered over to the Xbox area, and there it was. Alone. Last chicken in the shop. Figured it was a sign. The difference between the Kinecx and the Wii is basically thus: The Sistine Chapel vs. a child’s fingerpainting picture. I would have liked to have been around when Nintendo execs got a look at this thing. Cold clammy dread-sweat.

Never mind the fact that you don’t need a controller; it sees you, and reproduces you in the game. Not having followed the hype about the thing, I was stunned to see a blurry little picture of my daughter in the actual game, with the design on her T-shirt visible on screen. She’s already adept at swiping through the screen “Minority Report” style. It’ll be wonderful in ten years when you can get a bucket of video paint and do an entire wall, attach a few wires to the bottom corner, generate a 3D environment and wander around. Ten years after that people will be amused that you had to hook up wires to the corner of the painted surface, but there will be retro gamers who homebrew their own wired systems because it had a quality you just don’t get from today’s systems. Richer, somehow. Not as laggy.

What’s videopaint, you ask? Well, that will be the generic name. It will probably start as a trade name, then get bandaied soon enough. It’s a liquid embedded with nanodiodes that reproduce colors, so it’s like an enormous “TV screen,” as they were once called. In the beginning, calibration is a beeyotch, because there’s no set size. You paint what you want. The geeks, of course, painted every square inch of the floors and walls and set the thing to display a galactic cluster. Most people just did the entertainment area at first, but after a while people started adding it to the living room, so you could turn on various environments for special occasions. As with any new
technology, it transformed two industries: gaming and porn. Kids would buy a videopaint-conversion for their parents, then come home and find the room had an enormous 404 displayed on the walls.

“IT’s like that all the time,” Mom said.

New today: just a comic. Oh, by the way: FUNDRAISER. What do you get? Oh, 50 episodes of Joe Ohio, a pdf of my first novel, long out of print . . . that sort of thing. Go here for details. If you like this site, and you enjoy the Diner, well, you know. (Coff.) See you around!

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**46 RESPONSES TO oh the humanity**

**Jim T** says:
December 28, 2010 at 6:42 am

Watching the kid first fire up and calibrate the Kinect on Christmas morning was a mind-blowing jolt; a fast-forward into the future. I sat, slack-jawed, probably had a string of spittle goobering from the corner of my mouth.

Can jetpacks be far behind!!??
Bob Lipton says:
December 28, 2010 at 7:22 am

Sigh. I'm too old and fat to look good in one of those jumpsuits with the circular epaulette thingies.

Bob

Natalie says:
December 28, 2010 at 7:35 am

I'm becoming one of those adults who say, “It’s just amazing the things they have for kids these days.”

Well, I can't help but say that when a 4-year old was the one who taught me how to use a Wii.

And, James, I'm wondering if a gazebo made of titanium might be your only option.

kc says:
December 28, 2010 at 7:39 am

Natalie, I'm now wondering why James doesn't have a permanent structure built – I've noticed some nice ones in the finer neighborhoods in NEFL. Of course, we don't have 6 feet of snow every winter…

James, my 3yo granddaughter is becoming expert at using the mouse on this computer to “play” a little thing from Sesame Street. She's 3. What they'll have at their house as she gets older still fascinates me but doesn't make me ‘want one!'

Yet.

Kerry Potenza says:
December 28, 2010 at 8:04 am

I'm thinking that this costly new pipe replacement project may just usurp any plans for a Lileks' permanent gazebo in the near future.

Hegewisch Dupa says:
December 28, 2010 at 8:18 am

I'm just trying to understand why Robin has a ponytail…as though he weren't girlie enough

Tim of Angle says:
December 28, 2010 at 8:20 am

So how many times will it take before James gets the message that God doesn't want him to have a gazebo in his back yard? I'd have taken the hint by now.

juanito - John Davey says:
December 28, 2010 at 8:52 am

Well, that lesson was learned after the first two gazebos.

Comic Sins: Thrill Kill / Holy Bat Snuff Film.

teach5 says:
December 28, 2010 at 8:53 am

I know this sewer replacement is costing buckets o’dough, but I agree that a permanent structure is the way to go—maybe a nice, heavy iron job, with whole logs for a roof? Check to see if Paul Bunyan has time in his schedule to get one built by summer! Nonetheless, Jasper looks very handsome posing in the wreckage.

juanito - John Davey says:
December 28, 2010 at 8:55 am

By the way, I am appalled at the shocking lack of purple attire in today’s Comic Sins.

Greggtex says:
December 28, 2010 at 9:11 am

“When I was growing up, three thing responded to voice commands: people, dogs, and the computers on Star Trek.”

James: Obviously you were not lucky enough to receive a Tricky Tommy Turtle under the tree back in the ‘60s. “CALL HIM! HE COMES TO YOU. YELL AT HIM HE STOPS!” I was four years old when I received Tricky Tommy Turtle at Christmas 1967. It’s my oldest Christmas memory.

FreeState says:
December 28, 2010 at 9:12 am

How did Big Boss Bowler Hat throw a snowball with that overhand delivery, release it at the bottom of the throw, and still have the snowball travel up? He must have had some tremendous backspin on that thing to defy gravity like that. Which is really tough to do without the stiches on it.

Just wondering.

RPD says:
December 28, 2010 at 9:18 am

Lot’s of toys I wouldn’t have imagined in my youth. For instance my nephew got this Star Wars Jedi game where you put this circlet on your head and it measures brain waves (or some such.) The more you can think, the higher it levitates a ball. Go figure.

HunkybobTx says:
December 28, 2010 at 9:22 am

Honestly, James. A smart fellow like you, having lived in the upper midwest all his life, to think that a cheap fabric structure like that would survive a Minnesota winter? And after the previous ones succumbed similarly? It goes beyond reason. Perhaps you do it on purpose so you have something to write about?

Am I the only one not to get it? Maybe this is a big game being played by our genial host?
“Ha ha, the gazebo collapsed again! Let's take a photo, post it on the blog and see how many shake their heads in dismay at our feigned naivety about the effects of heavy snowfall on fabric and thin metal pole structures! Oh look, we got one!"

I will have to donate to Bleat Plus, but only if James promises to get the Giant Swede to help him build a Proper Gazebo(tm).

shesnailie says:
December 28, 2010 at 9:26 am

_@_v – methinks that maybe a few eskimo wandered down south, saw that it was full of bugs the size of canned hams – not that they'd know how big canned hams were being this was in the stone age – and figured they could live with a bit of a draft.

Terry Fitz says:
December 28, 2010 at 9:48 am

Gazebo is to Lileks as Closet is to Fibber McGee.

GardenStater says:
December 28, 2010 at 9:53 am

I love how Jasper is reclining calmly amidst the wreckage.

I've already told James to have a proper gazebo built (or installed– they have pre-fab versions now). So I won't say it again.

MikeH says:
December 28, 2010 at 10:05 am

Do you have a big shady tree in your back yard? Table and chairs under the tree. Forget gazebo. When leave turn color and fall, bring in table and chairs to storage area. Return outside when snow is all gone. Repeat process year after year!!

Are Batman and Robin flying real low to the ground after these guys or super hunched over while they run??

Bob Lipton says:
December 28, 2010 at 10:08 am

I think James wants a folly, but has a limited budget.

Bob

Lars Walker says:
December 28, 2010 at 10:12 am

Here's what happened with the Eskimos. The richer ones, the better hunters with the hotter wives, said, “You guys guard the home front while we go down to see what things are like further south.” Then they left and were never heard from again.

Eventually the Left Behind Eskimos got curious, and sent a few dispensable teenagers down to see how things were going in California.

Needless to say, the teenagers never returned either.
So the whole tribe decided, “The heck with it. Either they're all dead, or they're keeping a good thing from us.” So they packed up everybody and moved south.

At the border they were met by armed men with atlatls. “Passports, please?” they asked.

“Hey, you know us,” said the Eskimos. “We're relatives. Just coming to visit.”

“Sorry, no entrance without documentation,” said the southerners.

“What if we just ignore you and come anyway?”

“Then we kill you. There are lots of us now. Warm weather and lots of fruits and vegetables have resulted in a population explosion. No jobs for you down here.”

So the Eskimos hung their heads and went home.

This explains all cultures who live in arctic regions.

See also, Norwegians.

8Ace says:
December 28, 2010 at 10:29 am

Not a very humorous post:
The reason Eskimos, and other aboriginals, populated such tough remote areas is because they evolved through countless thousands of years of constant war and genocidal hatred and slaughter. The Eskimos in northern Canada stayed away from the tree line to the south, the Indians there would hunt them down and kill them all, man, woman and child, if they picked up any trace of them. That's just the way it was, historically, the natural human condition.

Sorry...

Charlie Young says:
December 28, 2010 at 11:08 am

That new gazebo might have to wait due to the major construction going on to replace that sewer line. You'll be reconstructing the yard in the spring, if the description of the carnage is accurate. Sounds like the big 'ol shade tree might be your best option until you can construct a proper gazebo.

Also, I thought you were going to come up with 17 permutations on Kinect before the end of the post. It is amazing watching kids take to it like fish to water.

fizzbin says:
December 28, 2010 at 11:20 am

I still say our Fearless Host needs to build a gazebo constructed with pre-stressed concrete arches, glazed with bullet resistant poly carb equipped with gun ports, all the better to survive the impending Zombie Apocalypse….but that's just me.

Charlie Young says:
December 28, 2010 at 11:28 am

Too bad Windows couldn’t have been more like the Kinect. If Microsoft engineers could make something as elegant as the Kinect,
they need to move some people around to other parts of the operation. Windows Phone 7 is also pretty nice. Don't know if it'll put a dent in iPhone sales, though.

**Charlie Young** says:
December 28, 2010 at 11:47 am

One other thing about the Kinect: It has a camera and an internet connection so you can game with others on Xbox Live. I suppose you can be seen by others on the internet. What happens if you leave the camera on and are having a romantic interlude in front of it? Does this add the gaming and porn portions together?

**bgbear** says:
December 28, 2010 at 11:47 am

_Honestly, James. A smart fellow like you, having lived in the upper midwest all his life, to think that a cheap fabric structure like that would survive a Minnesota winter?_

Maybe he got advice from the guys who built the Metrodome.

**Mike Zeidler** says:
December 28, 2010 at 11:51 am

Your sewer woe, coupled with another famous blogger (dooce.com) going through the same thing a couple of years ago, has compelled me to sign up for my local water utility's sewer line replacement insurance program. $9/month and they'll handle any cost up to $8000 for replacement. Additionally there's an “unlimited” amount of plumbing housecalls to clear the pipes of roots beforehand.

As for videopaint, I can imagine it being a complete disaster for retailers for a couple of years, as the hipsters will paint a couple of walls and program them to display Christmas/halloween/thanksgiving decorations, leading to a drop in overall sales for the year.

**JamesS** says:
December 28, 2010 at 12:04 pm

I too have a fabric-covered gazebo. And I too went to remove the cover for the winter, only to (re-)discover that the roof fabric had been stretched over the roof frame first, and then the whole shebang was lifted into place and bolted down. There really was no option to remove the cover; the instructions said to “remove roof and store.” All I needed was a 12X14′ space to store it — and a door that big to get it through.

So out came the Swiss Army knife, and next spring I will be back in Sears to get a new roof fabric. But you know what? Roof fabrics are a lot cheaper to replace than the entire framework — something I learned this past year when I too neglected to take the cover off before a 12″ snowfall took it down for me.

With me under it, by the way. Again, I too thought I could push the snow off the roof with a broom, but the first shove tore the cover, the snow came pouring in, and then the whole frame slowly collapsed upon me. Only the fact that it fell toward the deck railing stopped it from crushing me beneath hundreds of pounds of snow.

I am seriously thinking about putting up a post-and-beam structure
this spring.

**swschrad** says:
December 28, 2010 at 12:18 pm

@JamesS: the architect of the Metrodome?

**Paul in NJ** says:
December 28, 2010 at 12:48 pm

*There's so much snow I have to back out of the driveway with exquisite care, because I cannot see cars coming anymore…*

Not to be a wise-ass, but have you considered *backing in* to your driveway?

**bgbear** says:
December 28, 2010 at 1:06 pm

@Paul in NJ; sounds reasonable to me, I have several neighbors who need to do this to make getting out of their tree shrouded driveways easier.

Maybe James eyesight makes backing in difficult after all, how many garage doors did he run into?

Seeing as his garage has been described as “the bat cave” he could get one of those turntables that the Caped Crusader used for the Batmobile.

**Pieter DeVries** says:
December 28, 2010 at 1:08 pm

Just a nit-pick about that ‘no wheel’ thing. They've found many toys among Incan ruins that have small wheels. In the real world, what the ‘Americans’ lacked was any type of draft animal to pull wheeled objects of any size. No motive power, no wheeled development. Hat Tip to “Guns, Germs and Steel”.

**JohnW** says:
December 28, 2010 at 1:16 pm

Pieter – have you never used a wheelbarrow or a shopping cart?

**Cambias** says:
December 28, 2010 at 1:21 pm

When my daughter read this post over my shoulder the first thing both of us thought of was:

“They all said I was daft to build a gazebo in Minneapolis. But I built it anyway, just to show! The first one fell down. So I built another one! That one blew away. The third one collapsed under snow AND blew over. But the fourth one STAYED UP!”

**GardenStater** says:
December 28, 2010 at 1:21 pm

@JohnW: You took the words right out of my mouth…er, keyboard.
**swschrad** says:
December 28, 2010 at 1:30 pm

the obvious thing to do at the foot of the driveway is to chop fiercely at the Great Mountains of Minnesota, and toss pieces way back in the yard where they don't block your view.

in OGH's case, into the cavernous wound of the lawn, perhaps 😉

and yes, I've only gotten one of my Twin Peaks of Doom razed to a little mound. the whirlpool was calling my name, and I had an appointment.

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**Bob Lipton** says:
December 28, 2010 at 2:35 pm

Draft animals are useful if you want real wheels, but even more important are relatively flat areas that you can move around in. Not jungles, not mountains. The Quechua lived in the Andes and Mexico City is a volcanic crater.

Bob

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**Paul S** says:
December 28, 2010 at 3:15 pm

Classic, absolutely classic: Jasper hanging out admist the wrekage. I dont think theres much danger of dogs being under something collapsing; they are much more aware and faster than us. But they will not think twice about plopping themselves down right in the middle of anything, especially if that was their spot previously.

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**juanito - John Davey** says:
December 28, 2010 at 4:16 pm

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**Cambias** says:
**December 28, 2010 at 1:21 pm**

*When my daughter read this post over my shoulder the first thing both of us thought of was:*

“They all said I was daft to build a gazebo in Minneapolis. But I built it anyway, just to show! The first one fell down. So I built another one! That one blew away. The third one collapsed under snow AND blew over. But the fourth one STAYED UP!”

I'll forgo the obvious HUGE tracts of land and go with the more delicate we live in a bloody SWAMP!

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**Fred** says:
December 28, 2010 at 6:15 pm

Hey, the Eskimos were pretty smart. They knew at least, no one else was going to come along and shove them off their land.

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**John** says:
December 28, 2010 at 7:26 pm

It'll be wonderful in ten years when you can get a bucket of video
paint and do an entire wall, attach a few wires to the bottom corner, generate a 3D environment and wander around. But it'll be wonderfuller if you climb a mountain, win a war, or do real work. Video diversions miss me. I don't know. Something about a Brazilian soldier near Pico da Neblina urging me to try out his shotgun. He'd ejected a jammed shell casing by whacking a rubber sapling with a machete, plunging the gooey stem down the barrel, and hammering it with the machete handle. OK. I'm there. Sure, the empty cans I subsequently slew at 20 yards weren't moving. But all I had to eat was the food I'd brought and the rodent they'd killed, and the guys were amused at my use of the word *rancho*, in its original meaning as a communal meal among prisoners or soldiers. The bus to the Venezuelan border passed just twice a week, the fireflies I'd seen through my tent fabric the night before were pure white, and while all this was recreation, none of it was a game, y'know what I mean? It didn't come out of a box. After a “game,” you don't ride back across the Equator in the back of a pickup truck.

**chrisbcritter** says:
December 28, 2010 at 11:59 pm

Quoting the commercial:

“Tricky Tommy Turtle goes
When the magic whistle blows (*TWEEEET*)…
Blow the whistle –
(*TWEEEET*)
He stops!”

We return you to your regularly scheduled adulthood.

Happy Christmas with the family in Chicago; helped my nephew build a model F4U Corsair and had the pleasure of finding some of my Matchbox cars I thought were long lost. Back to the cold, rainy high desert tomorrow…

**Dave (in MA)** says:
December 29, 2010 at 2:09 am

Boss Bowler Hat must have a hearing problem, because only Rodent-Face Plaid Coat seems to have heard the *ninna ninna ninna ninna* music that precedes the *SOCK POW ZOK POW BIF BAM SOCK BLAP* they're about to get.

**JanetAZ** says:
December 29, 2010 at 10:52 am

Tch. How many times before the message becomes clear: AZ before you freeze your gazebo off?

**Peter Russell** says:
December 30, 2010 at 1:45 am

This is a blatant attention getting device from our resident genius — methinks he's had three of these blow up in a kerfuffle over the last few years — I think he like the sturm und drang of the destruction. Depend upon him to buy another rather flimsy model for next year, this one perhaps secured with dubious, skinny, gaily colored nylon cords designed to snap in high winds.

This is a cool font, by the way.

Cheers,
epobirs says:
December 31, 2010 at 5:13 am

There is no kind way to say this: Where does a guy who chooses to live in Minnesota get off questioning why the Eskimos put down roots? It reminds me of a time a few years ago when I was at a Networld in Las Vegas and Jerry Pournelle told an old industry friend whose company ws moving him to the Twin cities region, “Do you realize you’ll be surrounded by people whose ancestors couldn’t figure out the place was uninhabitable?”

OTOH, if human didn’t stubbornly insist on trying to make homes everywhere, we’d never have met the challenges that made us adept at artificially supplementing our environs for comfort.

Some stuff takes time to become ‘real’ for consumers. A video camera & genlock setup that could track movement and run stuff like a paint program was available on the Amiga back in the 80s. It was a great demo but far too costly to be a popular product, plus large video displays were clumsy at any price back then. Affordable big flat panels are a big factor in making Kinect an engaging product.
developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
NOTE! ATTENTION!

You'll get access to the BleatPlus pages as soon as I upload the sites and password-protect 'em; I'll email the user name and passwords. This will take a couple of weeks, but you won't miss anything; all the new premium content goes live on Jan. 18, 2011.

We now return to your regular Bleat, which has hardly begun.

Got an email from a neighbor tonight: they're in London, and their credit cards were hacked, and they can't leave!!! because the hotel won't let them go until they settle the bill. It's a scam, of course, but it makes you feel bad for people that actually find themselves in this situation. No one would believe them.
This was a nice day. I know we’re supposed to have great days or lousy days or amazing days or the Worst Day Ever, but sometimes they’re just nice. Home all day with daughter, who spent her time animating, writing, reading, playing the Kinect, and other winter-break diversions. I worked a bit – on half-time-sort-of vacation – and attacked the kitchen cupboards, which have devolved into a disorganized mess crammed with underused and/or redundant spices. We had four containers of cinnamon. Four. Each was almost completely full. Two thousand years ago people would have died when their caravan of cinnamon was raided, and the thieves made off with 12 ounces. Huzzah, brothers! Tomorrow morning we shall make Gaul Toast, and add a few grains of this precious substance to enliven the flavor! Now it’s common. I discovered that a bottle of rich murky sticky stuff had spilled, and cemented in place several containers of things I’ll never use, like the last inch of the Crate & Barrel Five Pepper Blend. Honestly, I do not understand Five Pepper Blend. If it’s a matter of strength, then the strongest pepper will outshout the other four. I piled towels soaked with hot water around the base; nothing. Got out the 409, which has gently caustic powers; this worked.

Tossed out expired sauces from “Ethnic” food companies no longer in business, or carried by my local store. You get a nostalgic pang sometimes: I remember when I used to see that on the shelves. There was an old bottle of Stubb’s, which I bought just to support the excellent graphics. One of the best BBQ labels I’ve ever seen. I hesitate to say more, because whenever you say “I like Stubb’s sauce,” someone says “Stubb’s is okay, but what I really like is Louisiana Monkey-Foot Rubbin’ Sauce,” or something I’ve never heard of, and there’s really no response.

It’s like that with men and sauces. Hot sauces, for example. I’m a simple man when it comes to hot sauces, for a few reasons: I used to be one of those masochists who enjoyed trying the latest blister agent, and boasted he could take almost anything that wasn’t pure distilled condensed scotch-bonnet peppers. This I don’t do anymore, for a few reasons: the horrid shuddering aftereffects, which make you feel as though you are expelling hot busted nunchuck fragments, and the specific pain you get when you get a little too much, and there’s nothing you can do but ride it out, gasping, your hair all wet and your forehead slick. I still like a good hot meal, but my old adage – if I’m not sweatin’, it’s not supper – no longer applies.

So for my morning hot sauce, it’s Rooster Sauce. It has garlic, and that adds something’ it’s like someone singing a nice little ditty while they hit you in the nose with a hammer. I’m done with Tabasco, because it seems like the default setting for hot sauce. I like to annoy people by preferring Frank’s. But I’ve
never made myself out to be a gourmand of any sort. I drink inexpensive red wine. On Christmas Day I poured my French oenophile brother-in-law some of the stuff I drink, and asked for his opinion, and he was kind.

“It is very young,” he said. Of course, the stuff he brings over is incredible, legally able to vote, but enormously expensive. Sometimes I’m glad I don’t know enough about the things I like. It would ruin the experience.

Found some jelly that had a USE BY date predating the capture of Saddam.

Found some coffee from our financial planner. He sends a Starbucks pack every year – Holiday Blend, with two ENORMOUS mugs. I mean, I drink a lot of coffee, but this is like drinking from the skull of Andre the Giant. Either you chug it, or it’s stone-cold halfway through. Since I stopped grinding beans a few years ago – it was a pain the arse every night and coffee dust got everywhere – the beans had gone unused. Well. I got out the grinder and chopped it all up. Tastes fine – unlike the decaf I made for people after Christmas dinner. I took one sip of that stuff and almost spat it out. Looked at the can: Chock Full O’Nuts Decaf, yes, I knew that, but the label had a picture of the Manhattan skyline with the Twin Towers. So it’s probably past its usefulness.

Then I replaced the soap dispenser, which involved some under-the-sink work with lights and wrenches and cursing. As soon as I was under the sink the doorbell rang.

It was one of the guys working on the ruinously expensive sewer drain. All day they’d been working; the glasses in the cabinets chinked and trembled as they pounded through the street, as if Godzilla strode the land. This fellow wanted to tell me they would put up some flags to mark the spot where they’d had to sever the underground sprinkler system. So repairing it would be easier. Oh! Thanks.

GNASHING OF TEETH & RENDING OF GARMENTS because that’s one more thing I’ll have to pay to replace. Back under the sink. DING DONG.

Yes?

You can flush now.

Thanks! All told, it took them two days to install a new pipe a fair distance, and this involved ripping up the actual street. The next thing to go: either the roof, or a big tree.

And now, a question for the audience. The other day, driving around with my daughter, the radio announced that a particular piece of legislation had failed to pass. A wail went up from the back seat: no, that’s bad! I was amused, and asked what she meant. Turns out the class had, under the direction of the student teacher, spend some time writing letters to Congress urging the passage of the particular act. It was not mandatory; kids could also spend the time writing in their journals. But most of the kids wrote letters to Congress.
Hmm.

Well then.

How would you react? I'm talking short-term practical here, not “pull your kid out of the public school"-type reactions. I'm just curious how you'd phrase a response, or even if you would.

*Today* does not have a big push for the fundraiser! On Wednesday we rest from the begging. Tomorrow: fun stuff. See you then.

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### Pass it along, if you wish

99 RESPONSES TO *pre-saddam jelly*

**swschrad** says:
December 29, 2010 at 11:35 am

later and reasoned responses department:

this is called “civics.” there is not enough civics taught in schools, which as a result, produces social morons who can’t think their way out of a paper bag. morons of the sort who support tin-star dictators.

however, “civics” ain’t *civics*, through which you learn how government is supposed to work, and then should learn how it actually works. “civics” is factoids, lite.

now, the way civics lessons are supposed to work is like this… the left side of the class, look at the FUMBL bill, and find reasons to support it. the right side of the class, look at FUMBL, and find reasons to oppose it. we will have a tag-team debate over FUMBL in five minutes. moderated.

and then everybody talk about the results and find out that every bill sends mixed messages and hurts some while it helps others.

and then look at what really happened to FUMBL when Congress took it up.

THAT is civics.

that is what should be sent to the principal and teacher in a letter.

**swschrad** says:
December 29, 2010 at 11:41 am

and you may quote me verbatim provided you link to the source 😊

**bgbear** says:
December 29, 2010 at 11:45 am

I would simply ask the mentor teacher if this is normal classroom practice. If not, they could take it up with the student teacher. If it is.

.

What get me about folks willing to ignore ethical, constitutional,
legal, etc lines because they believe they are on the side of the
angels is that they never consider that once they have destroyed all
the firewalls, what happens when they find themselves on the
“unpopular” side of an issue?

swschrad says:
December 29, 2010 at 11:55 am
@bgbear: there is a reason you are not supposed to win all the time.
this also is not adequately examined in school.
if one is lucky, they will learn it outside without the application of
many years of jail time.

wt says:
December 29, 2010 at 11:59 am
We recently cleaned out our spice cabinet. Six nearly full containers
of cinnamon. I lined them up on the kitchen island. My wife just
shrugged.

bgbear says:
December 29, 2010 at 12:00 pm
Last time I cleaned out the refrigerator, I was wondering why I had
stuff older than the refrigerator.

Kev says:
December 29, 2010 at 12:06 pm

*There was an old bottle of Stubb's, which I bought just to support the
excellent graphics. One of the best BBQ labels I've ever seen*

If you're talking about Stubb's BBQ from Austin, TX, you can order
their sauce here: [http://stubbsbbq.elsstore.com/](http://stubbsbbq.elsstore.com/)

*Found some coffee from our financial planner. He sends a Starbucks
pack every year – Holiday Blend, with two ENORMOUS mugs.*

Was it actually the PC Holiday Blend, or the more traditional
Christmas Blend (same coffee, two different packages)?

Kev says:
December 29, 2010 at 12:10 pm

Re the subject of indoctrination at school: Yes, you should always
speak up when things like this happen, or the knuckleheads in
charge will continue in their blissful ignorance of actually doing
something wrong. And if it was a student teacher, one could really
turn up the heat a bit by finding out which college s/he attends and
talk to the supervising professor, because colleges shouldn't be
sending new teachers out into the world doing things like that from
the get-go.

GardenStater, I really like your point that you consider yourself to
be your kids' primary teacher. If only so many other parents hadn't
abandoned that responsibility...
Cory says:
December 29, 2010 at 12:10 pm

@Garden Stater:
Your kids sound young.
Without wanting to sound pedantic, here's what may happen- yes your kids will see a brave father standing up for what's right- but that may not happen for 10-15 years depending on their age. In the meantime they might be of the opinion, “it's OK, dad, just don't make trouble.”
Our host maybe entering that cave about now.

Kate says:
December 29, 2010 at 12:12 pm

Re: your daughter's assignment in school, I think I would point out the error of the student teacher to the principal but not make too big a deal out of it (maybe someone can suggest to the teacher that a better exercise would be to write to Congress expressing your own opinion on the bill?). It's a great chance to have a discussion with your daughter about hearing the point of view of others and then making up your own mind. Even as a liberal I do not want my child taught a “liberal agenda” in her school. That's not their job and they should not have time for it if they can't find more than 8.5 minutes for lunch.

GardenStater says:
December 29, 2010 at 12:16 pm

@Cory: They're 14 and 16. And yeah, they might prefer that I keep quiet, though I don't think so, based on our conversations. Maybe they won't appreciate it until they become fathers themselves. Doesn't matter. As I said, We the People run this place, not our elected officials or the School Board. Once we forget that basic principle, we're doomed.

bgbear says:
December 29, 2010 at 12:38 pm

My favorite teacher in high school (late 70s), a biology teacher of great influence, got away with a display of anti-abortion material in the classroom. He was Irish-Catholic, he never lectured on the subject or condemned anyone, just had the material available. He failed in changing my mind on the subject.

I wonder what today's student teacher would think of that.

maharincess of franistan says:
December 29, 2010 at 1:03 pm

Recently had a hankering for a cup of “real” cocoa, but thought the stuff in the old Hershey's tin tasted a bit flat. How old was it? Too old to have a nutritional label on the back!

swschrad says:
December 29, 2010 at 1:10 pm

stone-age kitchen contents: for the most part, we tend to use spices and stuff before the color is gone.

or radically changed.
or the stuff reaches out and pulls the door shut when you open it.

but the commercial kits with a fancy holder for X number of spice bottles, that's a different story.

cleaning out Mom's house, for example, there was a 60 year old set of nice ceramic spice jars on a rack, some of that stuff was original. some was recent spices put into the fancy jars... recent being when Schilling & McCormick's full personal names and addresses were on the original bottles, for instance.

out.

the cool whip tubs of bulk spices in our cupboard are absolutely less than 5 years old, I can swear it. so we haven't dumped 'em.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
December 29, 2010 at 1:13 pm

@boke1
“Just yesterday I threw out a packet of brown gravy mix that my husband bought a few years before we were married which was in 1996 so I'll be kind and say he bought it in 1993. 17 years and 5 addresses later he finally admitted defeat and accepted its fate. I think he said a silent prayer over the garbage can but I can't be sure.”

I am truly saddened that you threw this away. Aged gravy packets have a taste and bouquet superior to any offered today. To a connoisseur this would be a real find. Plenty of salt and MSG to give it that piquant flavor we can no longer find. It may even have selenium and sugar of lead as ingredients.

Like I tell my daughter, if it does not have an expiration date on the package, it still must be good.

Cory says:
December 29, 2010 at 1:16 pm

Garden Stater:
You know this and I know this – but do THEY(school officials and administrative drones) know this?

Paul says:
December 29, 2010 at 1:27 pm

I put two kids through an excellent public high school (yes, they exist), and even so there were occasional friendly dust-ups with teachers and administrators. It was the kind of school where my son's economics teacher had only one picture on the class wall of someone associated with economics: John Stossel.

If this had happened to my kids I’d have first made sure I got the story right from my child – it’s astonishing how many times the details of an assignment get messed up between a child’s ears and his mouth. I’d then call the district and ask if this sort of thing is condoned or permitted. Invariably they’d say No.

Only then would I have a pleasant talk with the teacher. One thing I’d ask is: who paid for the stamps? That seems silly, but it’s amazing how the bean-counters matter to school districts. If the teacher put the letters through the school's postage meter there could be hell to pay, because the violation of teacher protocols included spending district funds. And even if the answer is, “I used my personal stamps,” that is proof that this was a non-school assignment. Either way you can now strongly urge the teacher to not do this again.
Follow that with a friendly letter to the principal, superintendent, and cc the teacher saying what a pleasant conversation you had, how the teacher will not do this bad thing again, and how you look forward to hearing from them about the matter.

Fortunately, this never happened to me. I invariably found my kids' teachers to be pretty fine teachers, all in all (yes, that happens).

**Mark E. Hurling** says:
December 29, 2010 at 1:49 pm

GardenStater and Cory,

My own experience of this was to listen to even the most casual conversations our daughter had whether with me or with her friends in the back seat. Wait a while, then ask some general non-probing questions so as to not to get their radar up for the inevitable, “Dad, don’t say anything about this.”

Then just go have the talk with the teacher and make it imminently clear to them that you’ll be paying great attention to them and your kid’s grade and progress in the class. Nothing really gets their attention better than that kind of scrutiny, indirect though it may be.

**GardenStater** says:
December 29, 2010 at 2:05 pm

Mark E. Hurling:

I won’t go into details, but after a dust-up with my son's principal last year, followed by a consultation with my attorney, I requested and received a phone call and a letter of apology from the Superintendent. He also told me the episode in question would be one of the topics discussed during the principal's annual performance review.

Ya gotta let them know you're watching.

**jamcool** says:
December 29, 2010 at 2:27 pm

You know your spices are old when the “Schilling” name on them (Schilling was a San Francisco spice/coffee company bought out by McCormick in the 60s-the Schilling brand disappeared about a decade ago)

**swschrad** says:
December 29, 2010 at 2:33 pm

@Jamcool: in this case, the name on the pottery jars of spice was “Peerless.” it is highly likely they dated back to the first couple years of the folks' marraige, starting in 1949.

that is about time to toss the celery salt and ground mustard.

as if the labels distinguished one content from another

**shesnailie** says:
December 29, 2010 at 2:36 pm

_@_v – speaking of old spices... we still have a few boxes of ehlers spices from before upc codes were mandated and a bottle of brer
rabbit molasses which does have a upc code on it but i can't recall ever having to use molasses for anything.

and real slick of that teacher using kids to astroturf for some patronage bill. does your church have its own school system? I mean, if you're gonna have ideology fed to your kids...

Shah Guido G says:
December 29, 2010 at 3:11 pm

I'm not sure our responses are getting at Mr. Lileks' question, which I interpret as being “What would you have said to your daughter at that precise moment?”

I think I might have told my daughter that it wasn't right for a teacher to ask students to write their legislators with a particular viewpoint about any political issue. I might explain that public servants (including teachers) aren't supposed to spend their work time on politics. Such behavior is unethical and against the law.

I might then explain how “teaching” should consist of exploring both sides of an issue. I'd ask my daughter whether the teacher explained the other side's point of view.

Finally, I think a word with the principal would be in order. I have friends who work in public schools and believe me, parents are listened to. Administrators live in terror of bad publicity and controversy, so attention is paid to parental input. Mr. Lileks is a member of the media, which means his input would carry a lot of weight.

Shah Guido G says:
December 29, 2010 at 3:17 pm

And I must say that I have always enjoyed the phrase “reality-based community”. It's an oxymoron. How can you have a “community” with no people in it? The next time I meet someone who is entirely “reality-based” will be the first time.

For better or worse, we are all completely out of touch with reality on one topic or another.

GardenStater says:
December 29, 2010 at 3:24 pm

@Shah Guido: Well said.

As to your comment about how to respond to the child at the moment, take a look at my very first comment, which included this:

“My reaction to that situation would be to tell my kid it was a stupid thing to do.”

Wagner von Drupen- Sachs says:
December 29, 2010 at 3:32 pm

There was an old bottle of Stubb's
That I'd used down to the nubs.
The graphics on the label
Were formidable (sorry!)
By the way, they also make BBQ rubs.
boke1 says:
December 29, 2010 at 3:40 pm

Wramblin’ Wreck – I agree! However it had hardened into a brick-like consistency and, well, I had to fight the good fight and shut off the machines. Love me some MSG and the higher the lead level the better. I offered to bury it in the back yard but my husband declined. Sniff sniff.

GardenStater says:
December 29, 2010 at 3:48 pm

Must be a Midwest thing. Stubb’s is still widely available in the Garden State. Let me know if you want me to ship a carton out there!

Dianna says:
December 29, 2010 at 4:23 pm

If any of those old spices happen to be McCormicks, they have a few tips and tests at their website. If the container says it’s from Baltimore, it’s at least 15 years old! Ditto if it’s in a tin (unless it’s pepper). If there is a code on it, you can type it in to their “tester” and it will tell you how old the product is.
I have an old, unopened box of Bay leaves that granny had in her kitchen cupboard. Love the old packaging and colors. Don’t know how old it is, but the price was hand written on it, and was 19 cents. that probably wouldn’t buy you even one bay leaf today.

madCanada says:
December 29, 2010 at 5:32 pm

Guiding principle: (lifting quote from I-forget-where) ... “Education should teach a student to think — not WHAT to think.”

Keep ‘em thinking, and the nation is good.

bgbear says:
December 29, 2010 at 5:51 pm

This could be adopted/adapted for all teaching:

You teach yourselves the law. I train your minds. You come in here with a skull full of mush, and if you survive, you’ll leave thinking like a lawyer.

Cory says:
December 29, 2010 at 6:22 pm

Any time you have to go to the lawyers on a curriculum issue you have lost the war. Even if you have won the personal battle you have lost the war.

Bob Lipton says:
December 29, 2010 at 6:32 pm

Cory, some days you have to win the battle.

Bob
swschrad says:
December 29, 2010 at 6:44 pm

@Cory: going to the lawyers is always better than “going to the mattresses.”

unless cousin Vinnie isn’t a lawyer.

AnnaN says:
December 29, 2010 at 7:55 pm

I roll my eyes at this question. Does it matter what the legislation was, or that they were asked to take a particular stance? Was the stance one with which you agreed or disagreed?

Is it about what was being supported and not the fact that kids are taking part in voicing an opinion to an elected official? THAT is never a bad thing, regardless of the stance. If kids didn’t agree with it, then they didn’t have to do it and didn’t get penalized for it. This is all shruggable.

And the idea that kids are indoctrinated by teachers is absurd. I went to catholic grade school and my views are incredibly liberal. I was the only kid in 8th grade who raised their hand when asked by the teacher if abortion should be legal. It takes more than one person to alter the values/ideals by which a child is raised. I wasn’t cowed, wasn’t vilified, wasn’t shamed, wasn’t whispered about and it certainly didn’t alter my values.

Rather than parent's being reactionary, they should discuss varying viewpoints to their kids and use it as an opportunity on how to teach kids to think critically. Unless, of course, that's not really the parent's goal.

Liman says:
December 29, 2010 at 8:00 pm

It would be nice to know which bill it was (although I can take an educated guess). The significance would only be to know how much anger there was to bite back. If it's too much, don't respond. It won't go well.

Bob Lipton says:
December 29, 2010 at 8:34 pm

I agree, AnnaN, that it is probably a minor thing, but Natalie is at an age where peer pressure and the ‘wisdom’ of teachers is almost overwhelming. I think it is a good thing to encourage people to think for themselves, even when good sense dictates that the point is minor and it might be better to shut up and nod.

Good social skills include knowing when to pick your fights — something that I’ve never really mastered. It’s also important to recognize that you can disagree with someone and not be an enemy. In the meantime, our genial host is still raising his daughter and has an interest in knowing that others involved in her life are treating her properly.

So, to repeat, it is probably not important. However it might be and a good parent should be alert to that possibility, shouldn't he?

Bob
Mark E. Hurling says:
December 29, 2010 at 10:01 pm

AnnaN,

I seem to recall how you mentioned in past posts that you had the hippie mom (parents?) somewhere in CO. Forgive me if my memory of this is flawed. Nothing wrong with that in any event, but if so, doesn't this strengthen the point that your family's values are of more importance than those promulgated at the school they send their offspring to? Even if I happen to agree with the Catholic school's position? Civics and morality can be taught without advocacy, or does it require the intelligentsia who know better than parents to inculcate these things?

Penciplal says:
December 29, 2010 at 11:00 pm

Perhaps James could have asked Natalie, “Why didn't you write in your journal instead?” May have explained some backstory.

bgbear says:
December 29, 2010 at 11:06 pm

I think I could find some agreement with AnnaN if the kids had a choice to write their member of congress either for or against the bill.

blivet says:
December 30, 2010 at 1:03 am

My class had an assignment like that in junior high. We were supposed to write a letter to our City Councilman. I forget most of the details, but in retrospect it's clear that the real goal of the assignment was to give us the experience as citizens in a democracy of having written a letter to an elected official, and of having received a reply. A good lesson, I think.

AnnaN says:
December 30, 2010 at 1:09 am

Heh, no my parents aren't hippies living in Colorado. Father is dead mother is quite liberal but nothing resembling a hippie.

As for peer pressure, sure there is some – there is always some at any age but it doesn't revolve around politics at Natalie's age. That might come out in high school, but for girls, the sad reality is that PP will revolve around looks and boys and more ... for lack of a better word, materialistic things. If a parent is concerned about peer pressure they are fooling themselves to think this has anything to do with politics. It's about weight, clothes, smoking, drinking, trying that one joint or pill on a dare. If James wants to worry about something, he's going to have plenty concerns in a few short years and Zomg, politics! will not even be close to being an issue. I mean really, I'd be infinitely more troubled if I learned my child had decided to skip eating meals because someone called them fat than if they came home one day and started to watch Fox News because all the cool kids were doing so.
GardenStater says:
December 30, 2010 at 5:47 am

@Cory and others: Just to clarify, and so I don’t sound reactionary:

I didn’t call my lawyer about a curriculum issue. The principal coerced and bullied my son, and verbally threatened me.

THAT is when an attorney’s advice is a very good idea. You don’t let things like that just slide.

Cory says:
December 30, 2010 at 6:09 am

Garden Stater:
No argument with that.
But when it gets to that, definitely outside two standard deviations on school problems, might be time to consider a new school.

Greg Zywicki says:
December 30, 2010 at 8:44 am

87 comments! I’m not reading all them, so I’m probably retreading ground.

Either in a nice email or a few minutes over coffee, let the teacher know that you appreciate the civics lesson but don’t appreciate the co-opting of your child’s time. A better approach would have been, “Go home and talk about this with your parents, then decide if you want to write a letter.”

Cambias says:
December 30, 2010 at 9:51 am

From Mr. Lileks's account is sure sounds as if the teacher had a specific position she wanted her students to endorse — a bill she wanted passed. This is contemptible. A teacher who uses a class assignment to generate letters to an elected official about legislation is abusing her position. She is trying to influence the official and is using the students as sockpuppets. I don’t see any good lesson learned, except, perhaps, “your teachers may be corrupt.”

Mike Gebert says:
December 30, 2010 at 12:12 pm

“There was an old bottle of Stubb's, which I bought just to support the excellent graphics. I hesitate to say more, because whenever you say “I like Stubb's sauce,” someone says “Stubb's is okay, but what I really like is Louisiana Monkey-Foot Rubbin' Sauce,” or something I've never heard of, and there's really no response.”

No, actually Stubb's is really good. I keep it on hand all the time.

Mike Gebert says:
December 30, 2010 at 12:14 pm

Oh, and don’t you bet the bill in question was the DREAM act?

Paul in NJ says:
December 30, 2010 at 7:09 pm
...Chock Full O'Nuts Decaf, yes, I knew that, but the label had a picture of the Manhattan skyline with the Twin Towers. So it's probably past its usefulness.

It's older than you think.
The mail today: an offer from a cruise line. “Cruises starting from $149.” I don’t think you could get a fishing boat to take you ten miles out for six hours for $149, but this covers a trip to distant ports, plus meals? Also: “Free Upgrades for All.” So the people who order the ultimate penthouse rooms are declared Captain, and have the right to change course, I guess. Mr. Lightholler, set course for Cuba. Ramming speed! It's probably something less exciting, like free mini-bar. But that's a fine perk. Most people regard the mini-bar in the room like chimps confronting the monolith in 2001: so many mysteries, so much suspicion and fear, because it's like an inscrutable machine – except the monolith did not generate huge room charges. Don't look at it! Don't touch it! Pretend it's not there! If you bring a can of Coke on board and put it in the mini-bar you know you will be subject to a non-standard inventory coolant fee.

From Eddie Bauer: THE ULTIMATE SALE. So all that stuff you said about the Holiday Sale was an utter lie, then. One of the pages insists “You won't find a better deal on Portuguese Flannel.” I'd planned to spend a few hours tomorrow leisurely pricing Portuguese Flannel; now it seems there's a challenge involved. We shall see, Mr. Bauer, we shall see. From Victoria’s Secret: “The Semi-Annual Clothing Sale.” That's it? From VS I would expect “The See-Through Half-Off Sex Garment Blow-Out. Costco sent a catalog that offers a great deal on a huge gun safe, five feet tall. Fire-rated for 30 minutes. After that you stand outside and hear the ammo go off like popcorn, I guess.
Also some Netflix DVDs, including “The Expendables,” which I rented for 80s nostalgia. Last night I watched “Miracle Mile,” a strange, occasionally taut movie about a lanky trombone player who realizes the world is about to end. I think it’s impossible to recreate that mood of apocalyptic dread nowadays. Back then we thought there was a 50-50 chance of the big whee-ha ICBM swap-meet; daily events always seemed to be trembling on a knife’s edge, and one wrong move would spiral us down to hell. I hated these movies, because I shared the free-floating dread, and regarded my own future as a coin toss. There were times when every merry diversion of the culture seemed like mad stupid dancing in the palace while the flames consumed the city below, and there was nothing you could do but scowl and write editorials and read serious books by New Yorker writers who were even more worried than you were.

Hollywood helped, of course, but it’s odd Hollywood seems unable, or uninterested, in making movies about more plausible scenarios. I guess stories about things that change the world are boring. You have to end the world to keep people’s attention.

**But.** I have no attention span anymore. LOOK A RED CAR it’s probably because of the holidays, and the way everything is blurring together into a jumble of blogging and typing and talking, with a million projects all being stitched together one jab of the needle at a time. So it’s probably common. You yearn for something different and then you get it and you crave the normal. Normal, however, isn’t due for another three weeks or so, as you’ll see eventually. The few months of this year and the start of the next will go down as the most remarkably unusual time I’ve had since . . . never. The only thing I can do to completion is write small short stories, and they’re coming out one a day after everyone’s gone to bed, and they’re becoming increasingly challenging. Joe Ohio is almost like tarot cards. I draw the matchbooks at random, and have to figure out what they mean. This one absolutely stumped me.
I share my character’s frustration: I don’t know what it means, either. Only that it has to mean something.

I wish this was a novel. It is, but not in the sense any agent would probably like. I could sell it as 150 short stories when it’s done, and people might be surprised to find a plot emerging. I’d love to describe it as “Mad Men meets Johnny Dollar,” but only half of that makes sense to anyone.

It melted somewhat today. Got up; looked cold. The wreckage of the gazebo is still unmoving. Blogged a bit, then did an hour podcast for Ricochet with our special guest and close personal friend, Pat Sajak. I really like Pat. He’s a swell guy. I mean that without built-in air quotes and other signifiers of irony; “swell” is a fine word. Now, “neat” we can do without. “Keen” has noble roots, but it sounds juvenile, and also sounds like the feeling you got as a kid when cold Kool-Aid hit a fresh cavity. It keeeens. Did you used to chew tinfoil as a kid to see what it felt like on fillings? We did. It was a sensation that made you feel like a robot. Metallic sensation that wasn’t quite pain; the brain didn’t know how to translate that one.

Anyway. Daughter went off to go tubing; I went out on an Actual Journalism Effort where I interviewed some people, then wrote about it at the office. Amazing. So I’d kicked 2500 words into the system, and there’s another grand to go tonight for the column, and this, and a short story, and I still feel like a
salted slug on Georgia asphalt accomplished more than I did. I should be scanning things and gently mocking them.

Well . . . here's the thing about that. Most of last year was spent perfecting my presentation of previous fascinations so I can let them go. The entire Institute was a mess, and needed to be made bigger and cleaner. The Gallery of Regrettable Food was a horror, and needed a stem-to-stern overhaul – finished in time for the tenth, yes tenth, anniversary of the book. After that, no more. I'm retro’d out. I need a new fascination. Nothing comes to mind, so I turn back to the past, looking for something else.

It'll come to me.

Sorry about the boring Bleat; it was a good day. Kid was happy, dog was active, work was good, a Diner was done, another holiday weekend looms, and thanks to Netflix streaming I got hooked on “The Shining.” Much cool stuff tomorrow! Because it seems I’m not retro’d out, at all. See you tomorrow.

Pass it along, if you wish

32 RESPONSES TO yawn

KCSteve says:
December 30, 2010 at 6:08 am

About that matchbook.
It's about the milkman.
Every day he's there.
Every day.

Bob Lipton says:
December 30, 2010 at 7:27 am

What better day to be dissatisfied with the past and looking for something new than the last full real day of the year? Now, to work, and we'll work it through during the hangover on the first.

Bob

Chas C-Q says:
December 30, 2010 at 8:25 am

“Hornaday”: the vendor;
“Selectmilk”: the brand name;
“(Drink it) every day.”: the exhortation.

You must be very tired, James.

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!
Will G says:
December 30, 2010 at 8:42 am

About your Blake Edwards comments on Hugh's show last night: you must recall that Dick Powell played Phillip Marlow in Murder My Sweet, so his turn on the radio was not a total departure. It is a fine movie (like most Chandler adaptations).

GardenStater says:
December 30, 2010 at 9:02 am

I, for one, am looking forward to sipping a Bloody Mary on Saturday morning. A little on the spicy side, please.

Chris says:
December 30, 2010 at 9:40 am

Kaeser & Blair was an advertising specialty company that had a sales campaign in the 70’s where they advised that you should tell the customer that they must be “braindead” if they passed up their offer.

I wonder if they still use that ploy?…

Probably not, they're still in business.

I think the Joe Ohio matchbook story could be about the old horse that pulls the milkwagon. The horse used to be a racehorse until he received an injury.

juanito - John Davey says:
December 30, 2010 at 9:43 am

I enjoy the Ricochet podcasts, for as enjoyable as the Diner is, hearing James react and interact with others is entertaining, especially when it generates genuine mirth among the Ricochet cohorts.

But just for grins, couldn't you have framed your comments about Pat Sajak as “Pat Sajak, I mean, he really seems like he'd be such a decent guy, I must say. Give me a break, I'm completely mental.” then bust out your triangle for a rockin' good time?

shesnailie says:
December 30, 2010 at 9:49 am

_@_v – everyday… everyday… everyday i bring the milk. i get the longing looks but ev-ry-day i bring the milk.

Jeff says:
December 30, 2010 at 9:53 am

I may have said this here before, but Pat Sajak does a very engaging job with the new video at Mount Vernon. At first I was “oy, the Wheel guy in a three cornered hat,” but you get over that “fast* and he tells the story with wit but also obvious reverence & respect, a neat balance.
Bob W. says:
December 30, 2010 at 10:12 am

“I draw the matchbooks at random, and have to figure out what they mean. This one absolutely stumped me.”

Just a thought...make a couple of “Draw Again” cards. The next time you draw a matchbook that really stumps you, set it aside and draw one more for that day. No sense creating a situation where you get stressed.

I almost said, “burned out”...but no. We are talking matchbooks here.

wiredog says:
December 30, 2010 at 10:51 am

Just sent you some BleatPlus cash. Had to try several times to convince PayPal that, yes, my address has changed and, yes, there is a letter in the house (well, condo) number and, yes, “7037A” is valid, and I’m no longer at “1207”. Haven’t been there for years, in fact.

Now I’m gonna have to actually look at PayPal email instead of automatically assuming it's spam.

And I see in Mail that I now have 4 emails from PayPal. Oy.

Should’ve pulled out the checkbook and done it the retro way.

Sam L. says:
December 30, 2010 at 10:55 am

I was one of those who held one of the “keys to the Kingdom of Heaven/Hell”, for 8 of my 17 years in Strategic Air Command, io, those many years ago. We didn’t want to participate in an ICBM exchange, but we knew how to.

Sometimes that’s referred to as “a Mexican stand-off.”

swschrad says:
December 30, 2010 at 11:24 am

that's not just milk. it's not select milk.

it's SELECTMILK!

Stronger than decay! Faster than a speeding Guernsey! Look! Up in the Sky! it's a bird? it's a plane?!? no, it's SELECTMILK!

// SPLAT! \\

and ever since then, the government has put down flying cows.

Silrette says:
December 30, 2010 at 11:25 am

Lands End sent out their “Winter's End” sale on Tuesday. That seems short, given that Winter had only begun a week prior. Used to come in 13s, those seasons, but with computers and such now, things go fast.

No, dear Lands End. It may be Christmas Selling Season's End, or December's End, or of course Year's End, but it is not, sadly, Winter's End.
Unless you're talking about shopping seasons, in which case you're right. It's time for flip flops and bikinis to hit the shelves, ain't it?

**JL says:**
December 30, 2010 at 11:33 am

There's more retro material for you to cover out there. Have you gone thru old magazines and seen the hilarious ads? The ones about smoking being healthy (according to the surgeon general) or about how you should give soda to your little children because it's good for them? There's lots of good material in old Time magazines.

**juanito - John Davey says:**
December 30, 2010 at 11:52 am

**shesnailie says:**
December 30, 2010 at 9:49 am

__@_v – everyday... everyday... everyday... everyday i bring the milk. i get the longing looks but ev-ry-day i bring the milk.

All your compliments and your cutting remarks
Are captured here in my quotation marks....

**MJBirch says:**
December 30, 2010 at 11:58 am

O God, that relentless parade of doomsday movies and books. When I was eleven, it seemed to me that my teachers were dedicated to flogging that message nonstop. “Well children, evil and inscrutable tyrants are going to destroy the world at any moment for reasons no one can understand and none of us can do anything about it! Isn't that great?! Now line up, it's time for volleyball!”

Result — chronic insomnia from about age eleven until the late teens.

I still can’t watch the movies or read the books. I did see “The Day After” last year and regretted it for months.

When I was eleven, I worried incessantly about the end of the world. I suffered from insomnia until the end of my teens.

One interesting memory from my childhood — when the Berlin Wall first went up, I tearfully asked my teacher “but... if the Wall is bad, why don't the people all just get really mad and tear it down?”

I was told that I was just a Naive Little Girl who Didn't Understand and sadly, such a thing would never-ever happen.

OH YEAH????

Happy new year everybody. And tear down those walls.

**MJBirch says:**
December 30, 2010 at 11:59 am

oops — should have deleted second reference to Bomb-related insomnia.

I wish there was an edit button for Life.
bgbear says:
December 30, 2010 at 12:02 pm

IIRC there a cheap cruises when they need to get a ship from one port to another at the change of the season.

For instance a ship that leaves/arrives Washington State for Alaska cruises needs to be sent down to San Diego for Mexico cruises. They rather make a little cash rather than send the ship empty. They also may be doing some training as well.

Mxymaster says:
December 30, 2010 at 12:26 pm

I dealt with the looming apocalypse by drinking. Plus, I liked drinking.

Cristiane says:
December 30, 2010 at 12:48 pm

Speaking of short stories becoming novels, did you ever read Suspects by David Thomson? It's kind of hard to explain, but it starts out as a collection of short sketches based on movie characters (mostly noir-related) but builds into a very moving novel. Of course, I haven't read it in years, but I really loved it when I did. Found it very moving.

swschrad says:
December 30, 2010 at 12:55 pm

apoclypses: us North Dakotans, veterans of being the world's third largest nuclear power by weapons within borders… we can help you cope. our example can be your pattern.

“hell, can't change it, gon' out to do chores.”

Steve Ripley says:
December 30, 2010 at 12:58 pm

Thanks to you, James, I am a big Johnny Dollar fan. Downloaded and listened to all of ’em. I was disappointed in the 1/2 hour ones, though. Most were way too tame and lost their noir-ishness.

Colin Samuels says:
December 30, 2010 at 1:45 pm

I had a dream once that you wrote a good news/bad news Bleat. You announced that “Johnny Dollar” was being brought back and you’d be playing the namesake freelance insurance investigator with the action-packed expense account, but the new role meant the end of The Bleat. Perhaps you could satisfy both audiences by continuing the Diner podcasts but charging whatever you buy there to an insurance company in Harford?

Troy Z says:
December 30, 2010 at 5:08 pm

Synchronistically enough, I just arrived at this blog from a website reviewing Post-Apocalyptic movies: http://www.post-
apocalypse.co.uk/reviews.html, and not coincidentally, the bulk of the content is from the 1980s as Mr. Lileks notes. I don't contend that this need be anything more than a strictly commercial response to the popular and aesthetic success of the Mad Max sequel “The Road Warrior,” but the underlying subtext that suggests itself out of this popularity is that the 80s were the time that, counterintuitively, we were socially first Okay with nuclear holocaust. Up to then, there was the poisoned “No Blade Of Grass” bleakness of global destruction, but with these Post-Apocalyptic (PA) genre films, we imagined that, yes, there was devastation, but, see, the muscle cars still functioned with parts from machine shop outposts, just as there were transformers available to make the neon tubes glow the entire range of the spectrum, which in turn, guided you to caches of hair mousse. All this disguised a desperate wish-fulfillment on the eve of mortality: it was the end of Life As We Know It, but you would still somehow be provided with the trinkets and trappings of technological advancement.

Actually, the best encapsulation of this zeitgeist comes from the documentary “The Nomi Song,” [http://thenomisong.com/intro.htm] when an interviewee, who was part of that early-80s band of artistic cohorts, described their “Nomi” lifestyle in essence as sensing there was going to be a big nuclear war, and, admittedly naively, it would cause a gigantic synthpop party. It's a fascinating skinny-tie time capsule of the era: [http://www.amazon.com/Nomi-Song-Klaus-Odyssey/dp/B00096S43U/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=dvd&qid=1293745468&sr=1-1].

fizzbin says:
December 30, 2010 at 6:18 pm

Ah, milk. What I would not give to share a pint with my dead Airborne brothers of that peculiar stuff they gave us, infrequently. It did not taste like evaporated milk. It did not taste like condensed milk. It tasted like ‘Nam milk….well, anyway.

I apologize. Today I attended a funeral Mass for my uncle, the brother of my mother. He was a Naval aviator in the Pacific Theater Operations. He was an Ace. I am morose for I was not able to tell him how much I appreciated his example of the Warriors Way. Without his and his generation’s determination and sacrifice, we would not exists.

I wish him and his brothers and sisters, “Fair winds and following seas”.

Steven says:
December 30, 2010 at 8:17 pm

Portuguese flannel! Lands End always makes a big deal about this stuff too. For years I have been convinced that this is all a scam of some kind. I suspect that one day about ten years ago, someone at Lands End was working on the catalog, and was looking for a way to make the flannel shirts sound more exciting. So he decided to say they were made of “Portuguese flannel,” and he counted on the fact that everyone would be too insecure to admit that they had no idea whether there was such a thing. They are just counting on people reading the description and thinking, “Wow, not just any flannel. Portuguese flannel! Everyone knows that’s where the best flannel comes from. Yeah, I remember seeing a portrait of Afonso IV once. He was wearing a really nice flannel checked shirt.”
Stewart says:
December 31, 2010 at 1:34 am

Oh, “The Day After”; I watched it up to the point where they decided to have a picnic in the fallout *the day after* the bombs fell. I said “they've got to be the stupidest survivors ever” and went in search of a good book to read. Of course, that was in the 80s. In the 60s as a teenager I figured out how to turn our basement into a fallout shelter. We were less than 20 miles from a SAC base, so a likely target; but if one didn't land right on us, my brother and I planned out how to make it through with the family, and figured we would go Russkie huntin' when things cooled off.

tim says:
December 31, 2010 at 1:39 am

How about this matchbook is an error brought to Joe's attention by a customer? Should've been “Select Milk,” not “Selectmilk?”

Seattle Dave says:
December 31, 2010 at 5:13 pm

To piggyback on Tim's comment, how about if the customer points out that the Art Department misspelled “pasteurized“?

Fred says:
January 7, 2011 at 2:13 pm

Somehow I missed out on all the angst about a nuclear war. It seemed every town we moved to was convinced that they were a possible target “because of the air base” “because of the Army plant”, etc. But it never gave me more than a temporary bump in my mental processes. Maybe if it had felt a little more real to me. But I suspect that my dealing with it was far more common than not.

Kelsie Gyaki says:
January 10, 2011 at 9:00 am

cos they havnt got nowt better to do
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| About | **Why a Stork?**  
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! [...] | 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? |
... and I am still up. I have a video shoot in the AM, too. This is insane. The script isn't done, The column isn't finished. But here is the day, including an explanation about why I had the COLD STONES to diss a geek-friendly movie director. But right now I'm thinking: huh? Of all the things for iTunes shuffle to kick up: the Kingston Fargin' Trio. I have one song: “Worried Man.” It takes a worried man to sing a worried song / I’m worried now, but I won’t be worried now.

Here's the thing: I grew up listening to the records in the front-room phonograph. It was an old RCA with a 45 table and a 33 1/3 table, purple fabric over the speaker. It had a radio, too. Took a while to warm up. There was a red light on the front of the cabinet that told you it was on, but it burned out at some point. I have to ask my dad where it came from – I suspect it may have been a hand-me-down from my grandfather. (Interest in latest-greatest consumer electronics clearly flows on the material side of the line. It's remarkable: on the paternal side, no particular aptitude or interest; on the maternal side, we had Grandpa with every new radio or color TV, uncle with 8-track and Pong.) The record player was stocked with 45s, from proto-rock to Ernest Tubb to Dixieland to Johnny Cash, and I listened to them all. I laid on the floor and looked at the albums and memorized them – including the comedy albums. In those days a house would probably have a Cosby and a Newhart and a Vaughn Meader “First Family.” I listened to them.
all.

Don't have a single memory of my father ever listening to any of them.

Did that stop, at some point? I keep meaning to ask. Why? How did that work, back then? You felt like hearing a little Johnny Cash, you put on the single, nodded along, then turned off the record player and did something else? Nowadays we have computers with 15,000 songs; you had an enormous wooden machine with 40 songs. One had to commit to the moment to decide you wanted to listen to “Ring of Fire.”

But you never did. I was the only one who played that machine.

Not to say my dad gave up on music: hah. When I go home and we sit up at night talking the TV's set to the classic country music cable-feed, and we see who can name the artist first. I think he might be a bit pleased I can pick out the great old voices. I'd feel the same if I'm 82 sitting in a house at night staring at the mountains of Arizona with the water fountain ploshing, and my daughter says “Elvis Costello!” when the angular sideways chords of “Accidents Will Happen" comes over the speakers.

There's no particular imperative for music to span generations, and it's more likely that it drives a shallow rift. But it's good when all is said and done, and you tell you pop you liked his tunes. It is likewise nice when pop appreciates what's good about your kid's tastes.

This can be difficult.

One hellaciously busy day stem to stern, but: I promised my daughter I would take her to a movie, so we went to “Tangled." Thursday afternoon, one PM – figured we’d have the place to ourselves. Every seat was taken. The audience was about 82% little girls. Wise all-grown-up 10-year-old daughter was rolling her eyes: they’ll chatter and talk and scream. She has little patience for tiny pink princess-mode at this point, and is mortified when I produce photographic evidence that she once inhabited that demographic.

The movie starts; the kids are quiet. The movie goes on, the kids are quiet. The entire film, not a peep. The entire room is transfixed. I think the adults were expected Yet Another Animated Movie, but they got something you could put on a shelf with Pixar. It was Disney's 50th animated movie, and I couldn't help but think Walt (and we all think we know him well enough to call him that, and know what he'd like) would be proud, and astonished, and recognize the hand of his great studio in every frame of the movie. Great songs, one short but tremendous action piece, a villainess that's probably the best of all the Disney villainesses for being a fully-formed character not a Bag of Evil, the best comic-relief horse in animation history, a genuine drunk midget, and character design that seemed a step above what everyone else has done so far. (No one looked like plastic.) We loved it. I probably loved it more than she did. She's not old enough to get the teen angle, and the dad angle – which comes at the end, full-strength – of course escapes her.

Then we left and walked around the Mall, which I love to do with her, and I
checked twitter, and oh crap. It's like this. I got up this morning, grousy, banged out a blog post, forgot about it, came back to the internet later and found that Kevin Smith had called me a douchebag. I probably deserved it, because I made a crack about his weight. But the post was about his decision not to talk to media about his new movie, and instead refer everyone to TWELVE HOURS worth of podcasts about it.

I thought this was a bit high-handed and misguided, since A) no critic will listen to 12 hours of podcasts, and B) jeezem crow, dude, play the game. But he was unhappy his last movie got a Rotten Tomatoes rating of 19%, and said the press was going to write whatever they wanted to write anyway. He said anyone who didn’t want to make the effort was super-lazy, and I said I wasn’t going to listen to the podcasts, but I could fit in one airplane seat. Cheap shot, and I apologized on twitter and on the blog post – for the tone. Not the point of the whole post, but the tone. Tone matters.

I wouldn’t have been irritated by it all if it hadn’t been for the movie itself. Didn’t mention this in the blog post, because it strays from the intended subject matter of the blog – nice non-political pop-culture information of little-to-no-importance. But this is a fine spot. Here's the poster for the movie:
Because those craaaaazy red states are the places where you're likely to find fundies, and the Westboro church is just the natural extrapolation of the red-state fundie ideas, right? RED STATE! OOHGABOOGA! Think of it: horror movies often have guys who A) kidnap victims, B) saw off their heads, and C) film it all for their own enjoyment. Oh, if only there really was a group of religious extremists who did these all things – it would give a movie a certain horrible topicality you just don't get with unkillable bogeymen. But Smith would never do a movie about Al Qaeda in, say, a city in a blue state. No one would produce it; no one would distribute it. But a movie that links the Westboro church to something inherent in the ideological distinction of a “red state” will get you backslaps from all the right-thinking people. It's lazy. It's super-lazy.

So that's what that was about. Anyway: New Year's Eve Diner, here! It's short – the 2011 Diners will be closer to 15 minutes than 30. Also, new ads at teh Gallery of Regrettable Food, here. Enjoy! And happy new year to all. See you Monday . . . with the start of an interesting tale.

PASS IT ALONG, IF YOU WISH

58 RESPONSES TO it’s almost 1 am

fizzbin says:
January 1, 2011 at 1:59 pm

Oh, deary-deary me. FAE's tend to get noticed. I'm thinking thermobaric rounds from a Mk 19. You can get closer to the action, heh.

Geoff says:
January 1, 2011 at 3:07 pm

My dad had a Kingston Trio album when I was a kid, also – I listened to it quite a bit, and am now surprised they let me seeing as it had “Samuel Hall” on it which has a few off-color words. I don’t remember “Worried Man” being on the album, but I do love Devo's version.

As for Kevin Smith, I subscribed to his tweets for about two days until I realized that I could look forward to 27 tweets per hour to complete one thought. I thought the point of Twitter was to condense, not serialize.

Philip Scott Thomas says:
January 1, 2011 at 3:54 pm

I am somewhat confused.

Mr. Smith makes a movie based, according to IMDb, on Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church. And yet he calls it “Red State”.

Is he ignorant of Fred Phelps's political allegiance and history? Or is he willfully ignoring the rather inconvenient facts for the sake of a satisfying narrative?
Either way, I should think being called a “douchebag” by the likes of Mr. Smith would be something of a badge of honour.

**dcmatthews** says:
January 2, 2011 at 12:08 am

One evening several years ago I was watching “Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher” (I think this was after the move from Comedy Central to ABC) on which Kevin Smith was a guest. The subject of China’s targeting of the Falun Gong movement for destruction came up; Mr. Smith, apparently stung by criticism of China’s actions, opined that America was no better than China, because we engage in “racial profiling”.

It was at that moment that I decided that it was safe to ignore anything this idiot had to say about politics.

**MaryIndiana** says:
January 2, 2011 at 11:20 am

As others have pointed out in this thread EVERYONE hates Fred Phelps and his congregants. Pat Robertson and The SF Gay Men’s Chorus agree! Westboro Baptist is evil. Kevin Smith has missed a golden opportunity to unite the country and sorry, be relevant again.

**Joni** says:
January 2, 2011 at 5:21 pm

Holy carp, that Cheerioats girl is EVIL.

**greg zywicki** says:
January 3, 2011 at 8:23 am

All you needed to know to get excited about Tangled (And, before it, Bolt) is that John Lassiter was involved. I think his Non-Pixar stuff might be more fun, because it doesn’t have to be _important_. Nah. But fun, nonetheless.

The very word “douchebag” is super lazy. It's not supposed to mean, “Non-leftie person who doesn't share my same unformed spoon-fed mile wide inch deep pedjudices,” but that's what it has come to mean.

**Lileks decries laziness | Junior Ganymede** says:
January 3, 2011 at 1:30 pm

[...] Among screenwriters. Because those craaaaazy red states are the places where you’re likely to find fundies, and the Westboro church is just the natural extrapolation of the red-state fundie ideas, right? RED STATE! OOHGABOOGA! Think of it: horror movies often have guys who A) kidnap victims, B) saw off their heads, and C) film it all for their own enjoyment. Oh, if only there really was a group of religious extremists who did these all things – it would give a movie a certain horrible topicality you just don't get with unkillable bogeymen. But Smith would never do a movie about Al Qaeda in, say, a city in a blue state. No one would produce it; no one would distribute it. But a movie that links the Westboro church to something inherent in the ideological distinction of a “red state” will get you backslaps from all the right-thinking people. It's lazy. It's super-laazy. [...]