Monday it begins: the wraps come off the Super-Secret Project. It's "Newsbreak," a noontime video news update on startribune.com. That's why the picture of a nervous, stupid-looking Ted Baxter appeared here from time to time. Your host will be the anchor for the kick-off show; throughout the week you'll be introduced to the other fine anchors, all drawn from the ranks of the StarTribune. I'll have a bit more to say about this as we get close to noon.

It's not the first such example of cross-platform synergy:
That was around 1938 or so. I’d give anything to hear what the news drama sounded like, especially if it was presented by a fellow who clenched his fist in victory after reading every story. Maybe I should try that.

Right now I find myself sitting in front of the mainframe computer in the studio, realizing that I’ve been here all day, and all last night, and most of yesterday, and all of Friday night. Scanning, scanning, over the bounding main, etc. My goal this weekend was to finishing scanning the loose stuff from the boxes of reader contributions I’ve stored over the years. With the exception of a giant 1934 Sears catalog and a few other substantial items, I’m mostly done. The amount of flotsam and detritus I have is just incredible – a letter from a young lady staying in the 44th Street Hotel in New York in 1928; pamphlets, cookbooks, telegrams, matches, magazines, and things like this. Another shot from the Levittown Gulag into which the middle class was herded against its will:
Dream no more, my lady.

The biggest job was sorting a box of First Day Covers into categories. Because they must be arranged in categories. That'll be the Engraveyard weekly addition after Curious Lucre has run its course. But I'm talking out loud, aren't I. Apologies — the weekend had no whee-ha heel-kicking of any sort. Saturday night wife and child were at a Mother-daughter retreat, and if I might have felt a bit depressed to think I did nothing with the “freedom,” I didn't. I never feel not-free. Nor did I feel lonely; I don't get lonely as long as I know I have a theoretical family out there somewhere whose existence I will
be able to prove soon enough.

No, just me and the dog. He gave up on anyone coming home around ten, went upstairs, whined to be helped up on the bed, sat and sighed with that great gust of resignation – the one human utterance dogs adopted and perfected. I knew he would get up early whining for his Grand Slam Kibble Breakfast, and since I’d stayed up until 3:15 watching an unnerving movie, I put his food bowl in the hallway, where he could see it. If all went well he would get off the bed by himself, help himself to breakfast, then head downstairs and find a different place to doze. That was the plan, anyway. I tiptoed upstairs with his dish, trying to be quiet, because if he heard it, saw it, and smelled it, then I’d have to take it back downstairs. And this would be confusing. I would find myself trying to convince a dog at 3:17 AM that he had just dreamed the food.

Paul Harvey died, which surprised few and saddened millions. Here’s the thing: I don’t think many felt close to him, in the sense you feel close to other radio personalities. Could have been the voice – it was commanding, bright, crisp. He declaimed instead of persuading. For the most part, anyway. He could get all gol-durn-gee-shucks when it came time to sell a product, but he wasn’t folksy. The hard edges softened over the years, but the tics and trademarks didn’t; the neologisms, the sappy anniversaries, the way he would almost neigh his name at the end of the show, and of course his unmatched skill at shaping dead air. We were used to him, but I don’t think anyone felt they knew him. They didn’t have to. He didn’t want us to know any more than we got, and we didn’t see the need to pry. Did anyone feel as if they really knew Paul Harvey? Or cared if they didn’t?

You try to drill past this persona:
Newsman, perhaps, but the term broadcaster fits better, with all its fine old connotations. A man, a mike, and the remarkable relationship between the two. It's amusing to read the Fark thread about his obit; the usual kudos, the usual “he came before my time so he doesn't count for anything” twaddle, the merry & compassionate “Burn in hell whitey” remark, and plenty of people who hated him for being a twisted, insane, right-wing nutjob. Well. He was a firm anti-communist, which of course makes him suspect to many who regard anti-anti-communism as some peculiar badge of intellectual integrity. He was opposed to government spending – can't have that! He hates schools and libraries! He was also quite the isolationist, and barked warnings and scoldings to the rest of the right on the issue; he was also somewhat of an anti-development advocate, bemoaning the amount of farmland and desert chewed up for housing and retail. (This would often be followed by a Wal-Mart ad.)

The people who think he took the mike and yelled out George Wallace speeches are idiots – but of course they think the people who tuned in to Harvey at noon were idiots, too, nodding and pursing their lips as they got their talking points for the day. Rubes!

Sometimes you listen to people for years because you’ve been listening to them for years. They’re part of the day. They come, they go; you forget. I did some radio Saturday afternoon, and afterwards we were trying to think who came before Bob Davis on the 9 AM slot at KSTP – couldn't remember. If you're a radio geek you remember line-ups like the way sports guys remember who played when on a winning team, but you'll always forget someone. Except Paul Harvey: the noon-time tent pole. He was on when I came home from grade school for lunch; he was on a few weeks ago when I turned on the radio while making my own lunch, forty years later. Ninety years! It's hard to feel sad. Sometimes you hear of the death of a famous person, or formerly famous person, and you deflate a little, partly because it's a pity, him being dead and all, and mostly because it moves something from your own experience from the ALIVE into the GONE column, and makes you wonder if you're replenishing your own store of cultural icons, or just dusting the ones you've had for years. For some reason when I heard Paul Harvey was dead (once again, via Twitter) I thought: damn. And then I wanted to applaud. Some lives are like that. Curtain down, the house is dark – and everyone decides, on their own, to clap. I don't know what Paul Harvey was like, and I don't care: that career was a performance. Sure, I'll clap. And stand.

UPDATES about the news show later this morning; Matchbook up in the afternoon. See you soon.
57 RESPONSES TO *monday, march 02*

**Lileks** says:
March 2, 2009 at 7:21 pm

Agreed, my friend. When everyone can recognize someone imitating you, you're doing something right.

**NeeNee** says:
March 2, 2009 at 10:26 pm

James,
Your forte is . . . WEATHER! Absolute best part, with Sports second. Although your hot lotto schtick made me smile. Hard criminal news? Not so much.

Pencil didn't bother me, and I'm so inured to technology the open laptop was fine.

Most disconcerting was the ad blurb directly beneath you:

“No Girl Friend? Read this and see what happens!” Tasty blond morsel was directly competing with you!

Apparently, ads rotate--because when I went back to check wording, different ads popped up each time I re-clicked the video start.

Best of luck in this new venture!

**Gary W. Allen** says:
March 2, 2009 at 11:50 pm

When I was visiting my Czech grandparents in Ft Worth in 1954, I first heard Paul Harvey's voice, as fine and sharp as the blade of a Bowie knife, slicing through the lazy warmth of a sun-splashed Texas noonday in Bapaw and Mamaw's cheery, unairconditioned kitchen. I was seven. I've always enjoyed catching his broadcasts from time to time across the decades, as I went to high school, college and law school, got married, began my career, became the lead dog, ran a US DOJ office for 20 years, saw my kids grow up, retired and became a grandfather three times so far. Now he Belongs to the Ages. And I'm 62. Wow, what a career. Thanks, Mr Harvey.

**SalesGeek** says:
March 3, 2009 at 12:17 am

James,

Yeah, lose the pencil. And the laptop unless the manufacturer is paying you for the privilege for product placement.

And nit-pickiest thing of all: take the price tag off the bottom of the coffee cup.

Seriously, though, it was a fine job! Your radio roots showed through and this is a very good thing. Gravitas? Not quite but I'm not sure that's what is being aimed for. Credibility and sincerity in spades with a touch of actual humor, though. Just what the dr. ordered for a mid-day news repast.

This does show some forward-thinking on the Strib's part. I think it's one of the best local newspaper sites and makes my local paper's effort look like the dowdy, poorly-done amateur effort that it is.
And even though I live nowhere near your lovely neck of the woods, I’ll come back just for the weather reports.

Mr Tall says:
March 3, 2009 at 12:18 am

‘Who cares, 'cause it's dark!’

Fantastic line, and I thoroughly enjoyed the newsbreak debut.

I do a bit of on camera work myself, and I know how hard it is to look breezy and relaxed. You succeed admirably; you're obviously having fun.

In that spirit, I agree that dropping the heavy stories (Not on your foot! /snort) is a good plan. I also think you're plenty smooth and engaging as an onscreen presence — therefore props out or deemphasized, and teleprompter in. You're in 16 x 9 screen mode, so you've got plenty of real estate there to work with — maybe the relevant web pages could appear superimposed on screen with you over your shoulder, a la news broadcasters with their graphics? That would free you up to read/react to a teleprompter rather than the computer screen, eliminating the need for those glances downward.

But hey, these are nitpicks — it's fun and enjoyable project!

marnie says:
March 4, 2009 at 3:29 pm

My friend's parents have that slide-out stove in their house STILL in working condition! So cool!

Angela Berger says:
March 12, 2009 at 4:08 pm

I'm 37 and I don’t remember radio without Paul Harvey. I know he's been on for 50 years but when I was 5 and was listening to my small town radio, I thought this guy was old. I know he had fills in in recent years, so when you would hear him recently, I joked to my husband that he was really dead but had prerecorded like 10 years worth of stuff so no one would know.

I will miss Paul, Goodday.
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?
I'm getting spammed in the comments by an ISO implementation vendor. Dudes: No. Trust me, people aren't poking through comment sections about retro YouTube ads looking for someone to make them ISO compliant. Whichever “Online Marketing Strategy Agency” you hired, you're wasting your money. Also, the award for sneaking a tranny link into a blog comment goes to this, posted in a thread about a Kentucky Fried Chicken ad:

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when u are eating chicken from KFC, is the chicken is male,female or shemale? » Von admin » <site name deleted> » Tranny Sex
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Never thought of that, but now you just have to wonder, don't you.

If you came here for a recap of the inaugural episode of the Startribune's new news show, you will not be disappointed. But first, psychedelic nudie imagery:
This predates actual “psychedelia” by many years. If you know what it's from, put it in the comments. Proof that the creative team behind this particular work was way ahead of their time – or that everyone else just spent the rest of the century catching up. But that's tomorrow's Bleat.

Unwritten, but a man has to plan ahead.

I have post-event recollective-mortification syndrome. This is where you remember every thing you wish you could change about a particular performance and start running around the block really fast like Superman when he turned back time by flying around the earth.

But, all in all, I wasn't completely horrified.

The feedback was interesting; the world always breaks down into the people who want to encourage or laud, and those for whom everything is either FAIL or WIN, with the occasional shade-of-grey we call “suck.” One tweet nominated me – well, no, flat out gave me the award – for the worst Twin Cities online video-type person. After one show! I've nowhere to go but up.

A few points: yes, I'll have to lose the pencil. Or replace it with a two-by-four, so I don't wave it around as much. I can't lose the laptop, though; that's the script. We don't have a TelePrompTer. It would be nice if I had a TelePrompTer, because then you can read without taking your eyes off the camera; with a script you have to look down and look up, and while I try to keep as much of the script in my head as possible, when you have names and dates and places it's a bit more difficult. At least now. At one point I looked down at my script and saw that I'd flicked the mousepad and scrolled the copy off the screen: oh ho! That explains one of the pauses that made me run around the block.

This is the sixth time I've done one of these – we've all been practicing for the last month, everyone on the “anchor team” getting their own day, with the others rotating in as assistant producers. I've certainly done better before,
and today was a bit off for me because there was just more pressure
surrounding the event. The mood was jittery. Also, the bosses were on the set.
Also, I suck.

Or FAIL! Or not. I’ve certainly been enjoying it, and I appreciate everyone
who passed along a thumbs-up or a note of congrats for getting the damned
thing off the ground without going up, or succumbing to a Gleasonesque
hamina-hamina, or pulling the shirt-drenching flop-sweat act we call “The
Albert Brooks.” But I’m not asking to be graded against the standards of
someone who hasn’t done this before, or is just getting started on the path
towards Inevitable Greatness – this has to be good and worth your while
right out of the box. If I end up the worst anchorperson in the Twin Cities in a
category that includes the pros, that’ll be a honor. Because I can probably
beat any one of them here, in this medium, where I can be acceptably half-
assedly okay in a half-dozen genres.

Here’s how it works, by the way: get the list of stories at 8 AM, meet with the
assistant producers & video team, decide the story order. That’s done by 8:15
AM. The assistant producers wrangle video, pictures, or props as needed. The
anchor writes the script, and hands it off upstairs for a quick vet. We shoot
around 10. So the time required to put it together is rather short. Sometimes
we do a run-through; I think today we just went cold. The first take had to
stop because I garbled a rather crucial word (startribune.com, of all the
fargin’ things) and played the “one do-over-per-month” card; the second take
had a mike malfunction; time was slipping away, which added to jitters.

You will have the opportunity to judge another anchor tomorrow, and the
next day, and the next, as the entire team gets a shot. Be kind – it’s harder
than it looks. Once you learn the vocabulary, you get it, but if you haven’t
been doing it all your professional life it takes some time to inhabit the
instincts. Doing this is different than anything I’ve ever done. Reading from a
script on a laptop, at an angle, and trying to remember which camera you
talked to last so you can whip over to the next one – it’s a lot more natural
than it was when we started, but it’s still the other side of the world from
doing radio and just worrying about doing the legal ID and hitting the post.

Not that radio consists entirely of that. Radio requires an entirely different
set of skills, and the people who think you can do radio by just talking are as
mistaken as those who think you can do TV news by just reading.

Is if fun? Damned straight it’s fun.

Here’s the first of many, many Sears scans. These come from a 1934 catalog
sent along by a Bleat patron. Mice seem to have feasted on many pages.

HOST WITH THE MOST
It's that miracle fabric, Swavel! There's actually a “Swavelle-Mill Creek” fabric maker, and I wonder if that's not where the name comes from. You think? It could be. In any case, it doesn't help Swavel's case to put it in quotes, which just makes it look ersatz. The women do look smart, though. That's the word. Smart.

**Today at the Bleat:** Comic cover around noon; Black and White World around 1 PM. Buzz.mn will have the Small Town Website of the Week up around 12:30 or so. A reminder: there was a piece of art at the top of this post. Where did I get that?
Kim says:
March 3, 2009 at 11:06 am

Oh phooey about the pencil. I LIKED the pencil. I LIKED the laptop. Hell, I liked the mug.

If I want a talking head with no personality I'll turn on the network news.

The Strib newscast was entertaining. It was fun to watch. I would hope that each anchor brings their own personality and style to the show.

You were being YOU and not some robotic teleprompter twit.

And that was what I wanted to see, that is what made it unique.

I'm still giggling over the prancing athletes! : D

Mike Gebert says:
March 3, 2009 at 11:08 am

If James wants to fool us he needs backgrounds from Melody Time or something tougher. How about The Goddess of Spring, that one's pretty striking.

Here's a whole blog about that stuff, hey, you knew there had to be one:

http://animationbackgrounds.blogspot.com/

Ron_in_CO says:
March 3, 2009 at 11:11 am

Great job on the newscast! I loved the bit with the map and the comment about the prancing Twins. You bring the newspaper to life!

Psydad says:
March 3, 2009 at 11:38 am

@ Jim T.
Hehe – you said gestalt… 😊

James – I liked the news break – it was just as good as the so called “serious” media – maybe even better – keep up the good work.

Eric says:
March 3, 2009 at 11:48 am

A fantastic news experience. The pacing, while hard to follow for an hour on radio, is perfect with the visual. I can see why you were the first chosen.

International exposure from day one! I'll be back.

Thanks as well for the many years of the Bleat. It is a treasure.

Nixmom says:
March 3, 2009 at 12:13 pm

James–I worried a bit over the “real” news stories at the very
beginning but loved the rest of the vidcast. The phrase that popped into my head, and where I think you can ultimately go, was “Dave Moore's Bedtime Newz”. 😊

**a reader** says:
March 3, 2009 at 12:22 pm

I just don’t understand what the point is. If I want to WATCH a newscast, there are ample sources for that, produced by professionals that don’t read from paper in their hands, with the constant nervous looking down.

I don’t need anyone to read the paper to me.

**hpoulter** says:
March 3, 2009 at 12:44 pm

“I don’t need anyone to read the paper to me.”

You need something.

**Ed Earl** says:
March 3, 2009 at 12:53 pm

Twitchy,

Leave the pencil. Take the cannoli.

Clemenza

**Aleta Jackson** says:
March 3, 2009 at 1:07 pm

“Fantasia,” the “Night on Bald Mountain” episode. There are even more disturbing images embedded in that one. Makes up for the centaurs.

**Al Federher** says:
March 3, 2009 at 1:16 pm

“a reader” (see above) has a point, I suppose. Newsbreak needs to do something that will make it seem less like a newspaper struggling to do a TV newscast. I have no idea what that is.

Open with the shot that shows “Star Tribune” in the background. Also, the other shot seems too wide, somehow.

Eye contact and a quick pace are vital. Wacky cuteness isn’t enough.

**coronaball** says:
March 3, 2009 at 1:24 pm

Congratulations on getting the project off the ground, now you, Jay, Conan, and Jimmy can celebrate anniversary shows together.

The first two newscasts: I rather liked them. You sound a bit like Dave Moore from the pre male-model news era, worthy of emulation. One beef: you are not an “anchor” to which the viewer can return after forays with the weather, sports, and rovingreporter guys. The misstates your purpose.
Warren says:
March 3, 2009 at 1:53 pm

There's actually a “Swavelle-Mill Creek” fabric maker, and I wonder if that's not where the name comes from.

Naah, it comes from the ancient practice of swaveling. I think it was mentioned in the Bible somewhere. Some baby or other, wrapped up in swaveling clothes.

swschrad says:
March 3, 2009 at 1:57 pm

that was “warbling.” they sang a lot, then.

now we have Spitney Beers to do that for us.

Glenn says:
March 3, 2009 at 1:59 pm

“One beef: you are not an “anchor” to which the viewer can return after forays with the weather, sports, and roving reporter guys.”

I think that's right. The role is more like a host, in my opinion. Maybe thinking about it less as an anchor and more like a host (and even saying as much) would also reduce the pressure to seem like a formal news show with some light-hearted quirks. Instead, make it more quirky. Or something. I squirmed and cringed and winced watching today's episode...

Chap says:
March 3, 2009 at 2:22 pm

Because the words the announcers read are near but not at the camera lens, TelePrompTers make the announcer look as though they're talking to the guy standing next to you.

I say keep the laptop, man.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 3, 2009 at 2:31 pm

“I don't need anyone to read the paper to me.”

“You need something.”

I don't know what “a reader” needs but, “The Reader” needs to keep some clothes on 😁

a reader says:
March 3, 2009 at 2:48 pm

Yes, I understand less than supportive comments must induce a swarm by a protective bleatlamb.

Kent G. Budge says:
March 3, 2009 at 3:10 pm

Late to the party, but it took me about half a second to recognize it
as a frame from the Bald Mountain sequence in Fantasia.

I was surprised how much nudity there was in this particular Disney film when I first saw it, decades after it came out. I think someone already pegged the reason: It was “highbrow.” Except of course it really wasn’t. It was lowbrow highbrow.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 3, 2009 at 3:19 pm

baaah

Dave Kopperman says:
March 3, 2009 at 11:09 pm

Disney was on fire back in the late 30s/early 40s with imagery that was way ahead of its time. In addition to the Bald Mountain sequence, the ‘Pink Elephants’ sequence from ‘Dumbo’ is a highlight in both animation and psychedelia.

Nothing can compete with the climax song from ‘Three Caballeros’ (‘You Belong to My Heart’) where Donald has a complete psychotic break. It’s beautiful and scary at the same time.

Ross says:
March 4, 2009 at 12:44 am

The reason that, as early posters noted, more wasn’t made of the nudity in Fantasia is that, basically, no one who’s nose would get out of joint over it noticed. The critics that bothered to talk about were too used to artistic nudity in other forms to mention it & it tanked at the box office its first release. It didn’t really garner “classic” status until the ’60s-’70s animation festivals reintroduced it to a later, less shockable public.

Ryan says:
March 5, 2009 at 8:22 am

DensityDuck has it, in regards to why comment spammers attack blogs. Of course, YEARS ago Google stopped using blog comment links to determine page popularity, but that won’t stop the spammers. WordPress also has built-in settings that prevent Google from following commenter hyperlinks too. I remember being very excited when that was added in as a default, even though I had added it to my comment template early on.
O the creative temperament: child is supposed to have her own composition for an upcoming competition, but she suddenly HATES IT because it sounds like Baby Stuff, and the chord she stumbled across that really made it sound cool to me now strikes her as too dreamy. The song is cheerful but IT'S STUPID. Sounds like BOOK ONE. Tears. So we started something else, and once again – the virtues of mistakes and serendipity – she hit a note that gave it an extra dark zing, so we're off on another tangent. I keep telling her it doesn't have to be Beethoven.

I wonder what Beethoven's friends told him.

Ordinary day, and absolutely nothing about the outside world to report. Right now I'm kicking myself for watching both hours of “24” last night, because that would have provided some late night entertainment. But no. I had to watch the Crack Elite Sangala Mole Men drill up into the White House and prove for the entire world that there aren't any security cameras anywhere except in the chandelier over Plot Point Hall. I'm just wondering how that plan came about.

Men of Sangala. Draw near.

Ominous glowing maximum leader! How shall we strike?

We will take the President Hostage. In the White House.

Fortune favors the bold, sir. But how?
This I do not know. Get your men on it. Find some shadowy businessmen. They will help.

(The next day)

Good news, sir. We have located a tunnel that goes underneath the White House, but I don’t -

No contractions! We are Africans!

I am sorry. We do not know if it leads anywhere, but the person who gave us the plans -

It is pronounced Plons! We are Africans! How will they know we are Africans if we use contractions and say plans?

Sorry sir. The plons included a very large picture of the White House, so it must lead straight to the Executive wing.

Very good! I will relish this. Begin the complex series of terrorist events!

Tuesday was one long cold nut-studded cheese log, and the less said the better. Did what I had to do, and wandered through the day with the enthusiasm usually found in those frozen skeletons they unearth in Alpine glaciers. The week suddenly felt long and arid; the full weight and scope of MARCH stretched ahead unleavened by warmth or greenery. And then of course there’s the news. I think we enjoy the weekends so much these days because it’s a respite from the grand parade of craptacular stories that run M-F. Really: on Sunday night I get that sinking feeling when I realize that Monday will bring more horror stories. It’s our leading export!

I’m content for the moment to let other bloggers be furious on my general behalf, but I am damned tired of losing money, knowing I will have less money in the future, and what I do have will be worth less because of inflation. All of which means I save less, invest less, spend less, and give less. But that’s fine, since we all went mad Mad MAD in the last ten years, and now we have to atone. It’s the Guilted Age.

There’s the temptation to curl up in the cozy cave of the long-dead past, where nothing can hurt you, but that’s a coward’s dodge. Really, I don’t mean for this site to become one long saunter down Memory Lane. Too much nostalgia makes you feel out of sorts with your own time. When you return to the real world it’s like putting on work pants after a weekend in sweats.

And: Too much attention paid to the artifacts of pop culture gives them more weight than they had. At most I try to infer values and preconceptions from the movies and shows, not take their messages as The Way Things Really Were in the Perfect Age Before Hippies.
We can’t recreate context. A happy go-go camera ad may look groovy and all, and make people think *gee, the sixties were fun!* But you have to imagine it blaring out into a small shabby room with yellow carpet, where a guy in a stained T-shirt over a potbelly is eating Swanson’s off a folding tray. Outside, New Jersey. (The bad part.) All of this stuff was background noise. Life was then as life is now: work, food, family, leisure, heartbreak, sleep, backaches, cake, trouble abroad in some damn spot, worries at home over some damned thing.

Most of your life is spent trying to recreate the emotions of an imperfectly reconstructed memory of childhood happiness. The other part is spent trying to escape, or at least process and purge, an equally imperfect recollection of childhood unhappiness. Better to be driven by the former rather than the latter, obviously. And the more shapeless the emotion, the less specific the event, the easier it’ll be to recreate it, and the happier you’ll be. I find these artifacts of my very early youth so interesting because I had a happy childhood, and all these musical cues, hues, fabrics, patterns, et cetera, are the furnishings of a place I enjoyed. But they’re not important because they happened to *me* or any other late Boomer; they’re important because you can get some sense of the era by the objects it left behind.

If you *want* to, that is. Some people have no taste for studying the past, and that’s fine; others view it as a source of amusement, because they were stupid and we’re not and people had funny hair and it was sad that they didn’t have color or sound until 1952. These are the hopeless morons who type YouTube comments on keyboards filthy with nacho dust – except for the apostrophe and Shift key. They’re pristine.

Anyway. Yesterday I put up a picture, and wondered if anyone knew where it was from; of course, a few readers got it right away: it’s from the “Night on Bald Mountain” sequence in “Fantasia,” from 1939. For some reason the other night I watched part of the movie again. Googled around for some commentary, came across a piece that noted how odd it was to have a sequence about evolution then end with a note of religious belief. (Sigh. Yes, how do you square that.) The “Rite of Spring” section, carved up as it was and used for dinosaur images, was something I saw in grade school, and I remember how disturbing it was – not the images, which were great because you had dinosaurs fighting and then one of them died and then they all marched off in the desert and died and then mountains came up!

No, it was the music that unnerved. It’s the most frightening piece of music ever composed. Not zweet! zweet! Psycho scary, but ecstatically mad, communally cruel, godless, ignorant, passionate, full of horrible conviction. It’s everything inside us we need to keep hidden. I know it’s bad and unnatural and Herbert to repress our inner selves, but if there’s any species that needs to do a good & thorough job of repressing, it’s us. Otherwise it’s virgins down the volcano twice a year and three times if there’s an eclipse.

*Here’s a YouTube clip* with a better version of “Rite.” Listen for the timpani at 1:16: absolute bloodlust.
The Night on Bald Mountain sequence was always the show-stopper when I saw the movie on the screen, and “Ave Maria” was the itchy-church-pants part that undid all the cool darkness of the earlier part. *Man, pass the collection plate already.* Now I think it looks amazing; it’s one of the most beautiful sequences of animation ever created.

**But that’s** not the point here. I’m not sure what my point is, but I’m confident that if I write long enough, I’ll find one. Oh: right. Today at the Corner Derbyshire linked to an old *Teachout piece on middlebrow culture,* something we’ve knocked around here a bit. By the time I knew the word it was a term of derision, made suspect by the usual suspects: the effete pointy-headed nattering kabobs of elitism! Er, no. Well, sort of: it seems as if there was an odd decision in the sixties by the cultural elites to eliminate the middle and accentuate the lower, because the lower was more earthy and authentic and real. Intellectual slumming at its finest. I think the middlebrow spirit had run its course, too. It’s hard to tell people to better themselves when the rest of the culture is telling them they’re already great – or suffering some sort of oppression that can’t be cured by listening to Beethoven. So high culture drifted off into the ether, became formless and irrelevant, and low / pop culture became culture, period.

Ah, but once upon a time. The ultimate middlebrow moment:
Mickey and Stokowski. Hiya! Put ‘er there!

That’s how it worked: Mickey had to climb up; Leopold had to bend down.

Ach, now I remember what my point was. The Toccata & Fugue sequence, once my favorite, is now my least. But it ends with the images that made me want to be a conductor:
And, not incidentally, probably sent me off on the Path of Retro. Not just that, but this:
The streamlined mountaintop! The Cliff of Modernity! So much of “Fantasia” was my first exposure to the look of the 30s, and it seemed impossibly modern and ancient at the same time – the sets in the “Dance of the Hours” sequence were straight out of fascist neo-classicism, if you want to be honest. There was the idealized classicism of the kitschy “Pastoral” sequence, which managed to ignite my interest in classical architecture, which led to an interest in the 20s, where the forms and vocabularies were applied to Noble Civic Buildings and impossibly tall skyscrapers. Somewhere around this time I discovered the bound copies of LIFE magazine in the Fargo library, and that’s when the interest in the past began.

I just have to be careful not to spend too much time there. Even the greatest museum is still a graveyard.

Today: Minneapolis update around 1 PM; Out of Context Ad Contest around 11. Miscreant Roundup at buzz around noon-thirty, if work duties permit. See you soon!

Tagged with: Animation • Pop Culture • Retro

37 RESPONSES TO Wednesday, March 04

Dave (in MA) says:
March 4, 2009 at 12:53 am

Would Sen. Red Forman threatening to put his foot in Gen. Juma’s ass be too much to hope for?
Ross says:
March 4, 2009 at 2:27 am

Dave (in MA):
Ah, but he's not playing Red, or anyone like him; he's playing a guy in high dudgeon when _anyone_ gets a foot up the ass (especially Jack Bauer's foot, it would seem)…

XWL says:
March 4, 2009 at 4:04 am

Seems to me there's a movie to be made about the making of, and the premiere of _Rites of Spring_. You have a bunch of crazy Russians (Stravinsky, Nijinsky, Diaghalev), which is always good for a historical drama. The immediate reaction to the premiere of the ballet (it was a ballet first) included shock, anger, catcalls, seat throwing, and fistfights between those that supported and those that opposed the piece. The press after described a decadent display of gross sexuality and violent movement, plus the music was considered just as disturbing as you found it as a child.

A movie about those characters, set during the writing and first staging seems like a natural, wonder why it hasn't happened?

Ryder Duncan says:
March 4, 2009 at 5:14 am

I used to compete in piano competitions (years and years ago) and I never had the opportunity to compose my own work. It would have been awesome, actually. Alas, it probably wouldn't have made me like competing any better. I hated it. Still do, as a matter of fact.

Apparently Glenn Gould, the fabulously eccentric Canadian Bach interpreter, felt the same way as he suddenly stopped performing in public back in the sixties.

Somehow I don’t think any of this helps. 😆

You could try coming up with something yourself that's deliberately bad; so horrendous that, for fear of ever possibly having to play it instead of her own composition, she'll be glad to accept virtually any combination of notes she herself strings together.

P.S. We'd love to hear her composition, if she doesn't threaten you with disembowelment if you come within twenty feet of her with a recording device. 😅

just Ken says:
March 4, 2009 at 6:06 am

“Some people have no taste for studying the past, and that's fine; others view it as a source of amusement, because they were stupid and we're not and people had funny hair and it was sad that they didn't have color or sound until 1952. These are the hopeless morons who type YouTube comments on keyboards filthy with nacho dust – except for the apostrophe and Shift key. They're pristine.”

That's the second funniest and insightful thing I've read this week (sorry). The funniest was Jim Treacher in the comments at Hot Air:

The point remains the same. Don't learn from the past and you're doomed to repeat it, or at least sound like an idiot.

Brian says:
March 4, 2009 at 6:22 am

“I keep telling her it doesn't have to be Beethoven. I wonder what Beethoven's friends told him.”

Probably “it doesn't have to be Bach.” But that just begs the question back again.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
March 4, 2009 at 6:49 am

“Herbert” as an adjective. Heh.

swschrad says:
March 4, 2009 at 6:53 am

you know, this is really pretty mild for your repeating financial panic.

oh, that's right, we have oversight now, the lying stealing weasels can't try to corner the market on bubbles any more and take us all down with them. yeah, we don't have panics any more, we have recessions.

except this has the hallmarks of a classic 1800s panic. no credit, the bankers are sitting on their (increasingly brown-stained) moneybags, but they still find time for parties and yachting while the ordinary jobs evaporate.

we need a classic 1800s response. Swordsman on horseback riding through the exchanges! On, oh gladiators, for the Flag of the Tree! swish-swish-swish.

there, now I feel better. ready for a fundraiser at noon, and get the coolers ready for the quarter of beef I bought.

Glum says:
March 4, 2009 at 7:14 am

“Most of your life is spent trying to recreate the emotions of an imperfectly reconstructed memory of childhood happiness. The other part is spent trying to escape, or at least process and purge, an equally imperfect recollection of childhood unhappiness.”

I'm past that. I'm now trying to find some meaning in my work when it seems like everything's going down the tubes. If not the economy, then global warming, if not warming, the decline in my in-laws and the need to consider Where To Put Pop. Oh, and the newspapers circling the drain. Can't forget that.

Meanwhile, a line from Pink Floyd's “The Wall”:

But I have grown older
and you have grown colder and
nothing is very much fun anymore

Thanks for the Password memories. That eased the pain for a bit. Maybe I can reboot for the rest of the day.
Gibbering Madness says:
March 4, 2009 at 8:03 am

Too much nostalgia makes you feel out of sorts with your own time.

Shrug. Feeling out of sorts with our own time is something of which one should be proud.

Chris Gumprich says:
March 4, 2009 at 8:13 am

I've always thought that nostalgia, or even just a desire to return to the past, was rooted in the knowledge that no matter how bad things may have seemed, everything ultimately turned out all right. World War One, the Great Depression, WW2, the Cold War… all things that seemed potentially endless while they were going on, but in the end most survived and went on to the next crisis. Living in the present has no such luxury.

Out of sorts with my own time? I wear a fedora while listening to OTR on my iPod — I take the best of all worlds and try to live in it today.

What I'm trying to say (pre-first coffee) — nice piece, James. Simultaneously catching the joys and troubles of nostalgia.

Preptile says:
March 4, 2009 at 8:43 am

The “Guilted Age”? Twain fans would have caught that pun, and also spewed coffee. It was his worst book BTW, (co-written) w the possible exception of a 30th book that saw first light in 2001. It should have remained buried.
I read the Oxford Twain a couple years back, 29 volumes. Call it a “temptation to curl up in the cozy cave of the long dead past”.

Most of his books could have been trimmed, but he was paid by the word.
Still for me the thrill was finding a gem like the one buried in the above (screed)?
I confess that I followed not the musical links in today's gush.
So I probably missed the finer points.
But having thrown away a decades work as embarrassing to my current standard
I can understand Natalie's frustrations.
Having heard a few of your own above, my advice is divide and conquer.
Specifically, into 4 different columns. It will give us even more of you to love.
Oh, as a king of ephemera matched only by Jean Shepherd, I hope you can take comfort in the fact that most of it will be greedily snapped up by one garage sailor or another, on down the road.
Your words however like Shepherd's, and Twain's will remain your own,
and outlive you.
It is because they were well spoken.

Mike Gebert says:
March 4, 2009 at 9:23 am

“It doesn't have to be Buxtehude!”
juanito - John Davey says:
March 4, 2009 at 9:26 am

Guilted Age

I get word play! And I tip my hat. Parts of this could find it's way into screedblog, but you've leavened it with so much recognition of then, now, and tomorrow that it's unnecessary. Symmetry and balance. Such a delicate thing to produce, but there it is. A fine piece. The Strib could not do worse by featuring it.

I fell out of my chair when I encountered:

... filthy with nacho dust – except for the apostrophe and Shift key. They're pristine.

And I try to do my part by avoiding the Doritos and placing apostrophes, where needed.

Drew says:
March 4, 2009 at 9:36 am

I'm with you on “The Rite of Spring.” I like challenging myself with some of that crazy orchestral stuff, but as much as Stravinsky is IMPORTANT, I'll skip it, thanks. It's the part of Fantasia I always zip past. (Which has nothing to do with its bold pro-evolution statement that's supposed to destroy my faith but so far has failed at it, . . . and everything to do with the fact that it's ‘difficult listening music.')

Al Federber says:
March 4, 2009 at 10:11 am

There is no doubt that our culture is waning. Until that changes, there's no reason to feel guilty about indulging in (and drawing from) the past.

Doug says:
March 4, 2009 at 10:23 am

“Too much nostalgia makes you feel out of sorts with your own time. When you return to the real world it's like putting on work pants after a weekend in sweats.”
James: The above quote from the bleat is just one of so many gems in today's entry that I don't know where to begin except to tell you that it's an absolute joy each morning to experience a literary genius at work. Your stuff should be mandatory reading for anyone who has ever tried to accurately and cleverly express their thoughts into words. Thank you!

emhamlin says:
March 4, 2009 at 10:29 am

It was weird. As I was reading this Bleat, sitting in my living room with DirecTV's XM Pops channel in the background, I heard Dukas' “Sorcerer's Apprentice” playing. Really, I can't hear that piece without visualizing poor Mickey dealing with the endless line of water buckets and mops. Many days work felt that way, and I empathize completely.

“Middlebrow?” Yep, and proud of it. I can put down a copy of “Gatsby” and pick up a Louis Lamour without a twinge of conscience.
roger h (bgbear) says:
March 4, 2009 at 10:41 am

Maybe I am being naive but, there is nothing to learn from the future, only the past.

There are quite a few people re-discovering Ayn Rand and Friedrich Hayek in the present political climate. It is pretty clear that over 50 years ago, they “got it” Instead of reading Atlas Shrugged or something, I watched the Mike Wallace Interviews with Rand from 1958 and with Phil Donahue and Tom Snyder in the 70s, good introduction and fun to hear her talking around the liberal icons of media (Snyder was the most fair, Wallace did not seem to get it). They are on YouTube.

In science, sometimes the young researcher will get a quick brush off from the older one and the younger interprets this as arrogance and being close minded. What the younger does not realise is that the older scientist has heard it all before, that is, been there, seen that, proved it wrong.

Often the same thing happens in politics when trying to deal with a younger person who thinks it all started right after the 2000 election.

ECH says:
March 4, 2009 at 11:08 am

I wonder what Beethoven’s friends told him.

It doesn’t have to be Salieri?

Pookie says:
March 4, 2009 at 11:11 am

A stupendously well-written piece, James. I applaud you with great gusto. I think you need to write a book, or at least a collection of your posts. I would volunteer to promote it gratis to the local independent book stores in my metropolitan area (all 3 of them). Please consider it!

Gary says:
March 4, 2009 at 11:47 am

Middlebrow is alive, but on life support. Saw a commercial for the “100 Greatest Books” the other day.

Woody says:
March 4, 2009 at 11:56 am

Much of what we've heard about the initial reactions to the “Rite” may be historically exaggerated. There was plenty of displeasure with it, of course, but there were more than a few artistic elites who accepted the piece, else Stravinsky would never have made it to later successes. Also, it was scored as a series of “ancient tribal dances,” which would have made just as fascinating an interpretation in “Fantasia” had Disney so chosen.

One thing about Sorcerer's Apprentice, though: my first reaction is almost never “Fantasia.” I was an old Sherlock Holmes (Rathbone) junkie, and our local TV station always played a clip from...
“Apprentice” as the theme before showing one of his films. Thus “Sorcerer's Apprentice” equals Basil Rathbone, not Mickey Mouse.

Taleena says:
March 4, 2009 at 11:58 am

It doesn't have to be Haydn.

The Greats are an amazingly little circle of teachers and students as you read about them. This person was that person's teacher, who taught them and so forth.

James, if you have not been introduced to the musical genius that is Beethoven's Wig, run to Amazon as fast as your fingers type and do so. This insidiously wonderful brain worms will never let you hear “Moonlight Sonata” the same way again. There are four CDs all full of gems.

Ed Driscoll » ManBearMarket says:
March 4, 2009 at 12:21 pm

[...] produced the dreaded ManBearPig. Whom incidentally, was last seen around these parts at the end of this super-serial edition of Silicon Graffiti from June 3rd of last year: Filed under: Capitalism, the [...] 

Terry says:
March 4, 2009 at 12:25 pm

Towards the end of the Tocata in Fugue sequence from Fantasia, fireworks form a series of gothic arches that echo the gothic arches in the Ave Maria sequence (you can see at least one in the still that James has posted). Both Tocata & Ave Maria end with dawn and the sunrising. In a nutshell that explains the death of middlebrow culture. Around the middle of the last century the cultural elites decided that any Haute Ecouteur that was intelligible to the bourgeois was failing in its mission to be critical of bourgeois values. And look where that has gotten them.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 4, 2009 at 12:35 pm

Woody, was that one of the Los Angeles independents? Channel 9 I think, could have been KTLA 5.

js says:
March 4, 2009 at 2:03 pm

That's funny. I've been reading Twains' autobiographies and I remember a thinking 'this stuff reads just like Lileks.'

The Gilded Age, not so much.

Stone says:
March 4, 2009 at 2:43 pm

That's it: I'm taking "Fantasia" out of my kids' Netflix queue…
RR Ryan says:
March 4, 2009 at 3:04 pm

I suspect that Beethoven's friends told him to stop sounding like Mozart. Some of Bizet's friends probably said the same thing.

Warren says:
March 4, 2009 at 3:20 pm

*Fantasia* was and remains one of the best movies ever made, and the best animated film ever made. The followup, *Fantasia 2000*, simply couldn't compare.

Technically the movie was superb as well. Disney pioneered animation techniques in *Fantasia* which remained second to none for decades. The next major revision in animation was CGI.

Wow, what a movie.

RebeccaH says:
March 4, 2009 at 3:22 pm

I remember seeing “Fantasia” in a theater when I was about five years old or so (that would have been in 1951 give or take), and thinking the scene and the music were the most beautiful things I had ever experienced in my oh so very short life. The 30's and 40's Disney features were supreme, then, along with The Three Stooges (I was also entranced by Harpo Marx's harp playing). Those are what triggered my love of music and art, I believe, even at that young age. These days, I’m not sure what inspires my grandchildren, but what I’ve seen and heard doesn’t encourage me.

RebeccaH says:
March 4, 2009 at 3:23 pm

Oops. By “scene and music”, I mean “Ave Maria”. Until then, I had never heard it.

David says:
March 4, 2009 at 7:16 pm

“Even the greatest museum is still a graveyard.”

True, but reverence is learned there and nowhere else. Our experiences are our own personal museums in which we teach this to our children.

And leave Jersey alone!

Michael Rittenhouse says:
March 4, 2009 at 8:28 pm

I just finished reading Vincent Bugliosi's book on the Kennedy assassination. What struck me (second only to the obviousness of Oswald's sole responsibility) was, in the chapter on Ruby, how casual the relationship between cops and the public was in those days.

Ruby not only carried a pistol most of the time, he even got a police officer to buy it for him so he could save on the sales tax (about 5 percent). And on those occasions when Ruby got taken into custody...
for some minor alcohol-serving violation (club owners got those all the time), once he made bail, they'd give him his weapon back ... even though no one but police officers could legally carry firearms back then.

They knew you, they trusted you implicitly. They didn't treat everyone as if he were a violent felon.

That's what I miss about the black-and-white days. Relationships were everything.

**blog nerd says:**
March 4, 2009 at 8:57 pm

I echo the sentiment: this may be one of the best Bleats yet. Nostalgia (happen to be writing about it myself at the mo) is apparently both an antidepressant and an apropisiac neurochemically--and rhe image of the Mouse you cite as middle brow? Nahhh dude, that's the first chunk out of the Berlin Wall between high culture and low, the Jenga piece slowly slid out so the whole towering division could come crashing down. The second Disney came into being popular culture became sophisticated. Fantasia proves it.

**MaryIndiana says:**
March 6, 2009 at 12:28 am

Geez James,don't overthink this,okay? It's just detritus from the past and we like looking at it. Bleatniks are smart enough to know that a Swingin' Kodak Ad did not represent 'real life' then any more than an iPhone Ad does now. (Really, people need an application that turns the phone into a LEVEL?)

So,keep scanning weird stuff you find in flea markets...we can handle the time travel and not read too much or too little into it.
If I may: we're closing in on 5K comments, and I just want to say you guys are wonderful. It's joy to read them. Thanks; you've made the site 10X better. Here's to 10K!

Legislator wants to ban Barbie.

Eldridge says he feels that Barbie and other dolls like her "promote or influence girls to place an undue importance on physical beauty to the detriment of their intellectual and emotional development."

I know, it's funny, because it's stupid and podunk, and Iran does it too, ha ha, and because surely there's a Republican maroon out there in a state legislature who wanted to ban her because she was sold alone instead of prepackaged with a husband. (If not, the mere suggestion that this could happen would be equal to it actually happening.) The specifics are absurd, and the story will go nowhere, but it still made my ire bloom. Now and then it seems that banning is all they can do. That's the problem with a free nation: you can't make yourself significant by granting freedoms, so you spend your time looking for freedoms to restrict in the name of a greater good, and there's always a greater good. In this case some muddle-headed tripe about Sending the Wrong Message, which would be a sufficient means to keep local stores from making money off the sale of a doll, and send customers out of state to Amazon. Providing the dolls aren't stopped at the border.

As long as we're worried about sending messages: it sends an excellent message to let kids know that something that might encourage doubleplus Ungoodthink can be taken away by the state because you might draw the wrong conclusions. Especially while watching to the Barbie Princess and the
Pauper DVD, where Princess Barbie yearns for a life of reading books, and Slave Pauper Barbie wants a life where she can work for herself instead of the old lady who lives off her labor.

Idiot.

Sorry; if I'm a bit . . . uncharitable towards my betters, it's partly because there's a rejiggering of the school districts going on around here, and there are mutterings of sending kids in our neighborhood to a different school. One mom noted that they might let kids stay in the same school where they've been since kindergarten, but they wouldn't provide bus service anymore.

I have the feeling that a letter announcing this change would note that they regret the inconvenience.

We tried the new TelePrompTer today – not the real thing, but a jury-rigged version that works just great. No more looking at the laptop. This will be a great improvement. Here's an iPhone photo of the view from the anchor desk:

We're shooting on the surface of Venus, it seems.

Virgin USA is closing all of its stores. I visited the one in Denver last summer, and noticed a few things:

1. It had no customer restroom

2. It didn't have the CD I wanted. Not that I really wanted the CD anyway. I haven't bought a CD in half a decade. I hate CDs. Not because of their antiseptic sound, but because they take up space. When they first came out they were the sign of a modern sophisticate, of course; as I've said before, the scene in "9 1/2 Weeks" where Mickey Rourke pushes a button and the disc tray slides out was the movie's tech equivalent of Kim Bassinger. We all wanted it. (I know they'd been around for a while, but they were high-end gear, I believe; most of us put the CD in the top.) Then you got wire racks to show off your collection of digital music. That's right, digital. It uses lasers. Like they will have in space. For WARS.

CDs ruined record stores. Before you could flip through the albums in peace; they made a soft, vaguely leathery sound as you rifled through the bins. CDs turned every record store into the sound of a hundred boxes of dominos
dumped down the stairs. CLACK CLACK CLACK CLACK. And they came in tall plastic sleeves that may have fit the old record bins, but made every CD look like it was on stilts. I didn’t miss records, though – not that much of an audiophile. But I liked the album art, the pleasure of seeing they’d spent money on a sleeve with lyrics (which often meant the band was coming off a successful record, and had spent the last year in a booze & coke haze which would make this album a slab of sludge), and the ability to slit open the album with a fingernail, or guitar pick. CDs had to be stabbed, hacked, peeled, pried, and cracked to get at the nut.

Mostly it was the space issue, though. A few years ago I exchanged all the old “jewel” boxes for “slimline” ones. They went into the garage. The records are all gone. Everything lives on hard drives, and I like it that way. Apparently I’m not alone; hence Virgin’s demise. To think they could have reduced the store's size by 90% and offered USB ports for downloads.

To think that the grandest, largest book store or music store will some day be the size of an ATM. And probably just as common.

I shed a tear for Tower, since that was the preferred spot to play hooky when we worked at 2000 Penn in DC. They had a video store on the other end of the building, selling my other hated medium, VHS tapes. How many years did it take before we stopped marveling over renting movies and recording TV shows, and started tapping our toes when the tape went into the slot? COME ON, LOAD ALREADY.

When I visited the Virgin store, by the way, it was empty. They had some cheap DVDs for sale, though, and I thought: I don’t care if they’re ten bucks, I can rent it from Netflix.

I don’t even want to own DVDs anymore. It's probably a psychological disorder: corporeal medium avoidance syndrome.

Busy day – XM radio deal, column thing, and no time to do Curious Lucre. Sorry! Well, maybe some time, but later in the day. In the meantime: Lance Lawson Thursday over at buzz.mn! Enjoy.

71 RESPONSES TO thursday, march 05

ak13820 says:
March 5, 2009 at 11:10 am

I was an avid Barbie collector as a kid. My primary Barbie lived in her own apartment and worked in an office. Having your own apartment was the height of grown-up privilege to me, probably because I came from a crowded house and shared a bathroom with four siblings. Anyway, the idea that Barbies filled my head with negative images of women is absurd. I would’ve been far more confused by today’s dimwitted PC-ism or those hideous Bratz creatures.

I miss record stores. In high school, Hegwisch Records in Calumet City, IL, was the place to go. It was allegedly owned by the mob, which explained why you were never given a receipt for anything. You got your LP, took it up to the Big-Pussy-Bonpensiero-looking guy at the counter, who grunted at you, and took your cash. We would spend hours there looking through the records and discussing
which black t-shirts we were going to buy. I don't know if the mob connection thing was actually true, but it gave the place a unique atmosphere.

Glenn says:
March 5, 2009 at 11:18 am

I'll chime in here: I also prefer to buy CDs for the notes, artwork, and backup-ability. This is even more the case with classical music and any sort of “greatest hits” or uber-special remaster version of pop/rock/jazz stuff. Still, I impulsively buy some things via Amazon's excellent download service (that's how I expanded the Xmas catalog this past holiday season, e.g.) and like others here I also usually go for a cheap used copy of something in the Amazon Marketplace.

As for storage, I've ripped everything and, like James, got rid of the large jewel cases to great reduce the collection's physical footprint. Instead of slim plastic replacements though, I bought 5000 archival-quality plastic sleeves ($25?) and 5 Ikea CD holder boxes (“Mackis”). So far so good.

Never been a movie buff, so I don't own very many DVDs at all and most of those are concerts.

dan says:
March 5, 2009 at 11:33 am

Never trust people who want to ban things. They're either looking to find something to sacrifice to an angry mob so they look good OR they want to ban everything and just haven't worked their way through the list yet.
On a happier note: I like CDs, mostly for sentimental reasons. I have fond memories of buying my first CDs on a shopping trip with my mom c1991. I only buy them now if a song I want is unavailable through any other means. Even then all I do is rip the contents and shove them in the iPod.

thomas tucker says:
March 5, 2009 at 11:35 am

glenn- where did you get those plastic sleeves? I'm in the process of transferring cd's to ipod, and want to store the cd's.

Spud says:
March 5, 2009 at 11:46 am

I'll add to the “hear hear's” for CD's and DVD's, though there's not much music or many movies that I like enough to spend +$10. I do NOT trust downloaded content, where you either have to deal with DRM or a possible “bug” happens to latch on and infest your computer. The music companies screwed themselves over with their DRM policies and I doubt they will ever recover.

Good to hear you stand up for Barbie movies. My daughter has a few of them and they're better than I expected. If you don't mind the CGI animation, the stories are OK and the music is pretty good. It keeps her attention too, which is not such an easy thing.

[Best album for “cleaning” - Eat A Peach, Allman Bros. It had a nice textured paper, lighter colors inside, and you could listen to extended Duane Allman and Richard Betts solos.]
thomas tucker says:
March 5, 2009 at 11:51 am

Spud - I'm glad you reminded me of that album. Now I have to go obtain it.
I still love Midnight Rider.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 5, 2009 at 11:53 am

CD/DVD Storage.

These are cool, designed for DJs. Comes with numbered sleeves for indexing. We use them at home and my wife makes a Filemaker index.

http://cgi.ebay.com/Aluminum-510-CD-R-DVD-Storage-Case-w-Sleeves-DJ_W0QQitemZ3601354523844QcmdZViewItemQOptrZB1Blank_Media?hash=item360135452584&_trksid=p3286.c0.m14&_trkparms=72%3A1240|66%3A2|65%3A12|39%3A1|240%3A1318|301%3A1|293%3A1|294%3A50

Spud says:
March 5, 2009 at 12:01 pm

Oh yeah – I liked visiting the Tower store in Philly (South St.?) during my brief stay in Pennsylvania. They had several floors you could roam. There was also a great comic book store close by, an Italian ice stand and an outstanding gyros take-out that had some mouth-watering souvlaki sandwiches. Of course you could walk down a few blocks to cheese-steak heaven and Market St. too.

For those who are interested in making backup copies of their CD's, I would suggest you check out Full Lossless Audio Codec, or the .flac extension. It's a little more work than ripping to .mp3, but you only lose a little fidelity you have on the original CD (.wav) yet still have a compressed file.

Spud says:
March 5, 2009 at 12:04 pm

thomas tucker:
Check out Wolfgang's Vault (don't have the URL memorized!). All you have to do is give them your e-mail address and you have free access to stream a ton of good music, including the Allman Bros. concert at Fillmore East that's on the “Eat a Peach” album.

thomas tucker says:
March 5, 2009 at 12:14 pm

btw, does anyone know how long it's estimated that the music on cd's will last?

DaveInAz says:
March 5, 2009 at 12:51 pm

If it's Beethoven, it'll last another 500 years. If it's a boy band, it's already fading. If it's Cher, it'll keep going away and coming back forever.

Patrick says:
March 5, 2009 at 12:58 pm

Another good thing about LPs was all the goodies that sometimes came with them. Someone had mentioned the MONSTROUS rolling paper from the Cheech and Chong album (I heard one also came with “Up In Smoke.”). I remember reading about how the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper" album came with cutouts of the band with their Sgt. Pepper uniforms that could be stood up, some iron-on badges, and a
fake mustache. I remember going to a flea market one time and seeing some pictures hanging up in one of the booths that had the Beatles. The guy working the booth kinda knew it was them, but didn’t know anything else about the pictures. I recognized it immediately: They were pictures from their video for “I Am The Walrus”, which probably came with every LP copy of “Magical Mystery Tour.” I told him what they were, and he thanked me. I wish he had given them to me, or sold them to me. I recognized it mainly due to the costumes they wore, and the artwork on Ringo’s bass drum.

Heard on “Empty Spaces” from Pink Floyd’s “The Wall”:

In order to do that now, you have to run it through your computer, download the “Reverse Speech” program, and try to sync it up.

hpouler says:
March 5, 2009 at 1:24 pm

And speaking of LP fun – remember Monty Python’s “Matching Tie and Hankerchief”? That was a three-sided album! One side was cut with two concentric spiral grooves, so depending on where you dropped the needle, you got one of two album sides. Try THAT with your mp3.

DaveInAz says:
March 5, 2009 at 1:38 pm

HA! I have “Matching Tie and Handkerchief”, and an operating turntable! I remember being confused by that for a while… thanks for the reminder, hp!

Kent G. Budge says:
March 5, 2009 at 1:41 pm

The Left likes to say that the Right want to intrude into your bedroom.

Meanwhile, the Left is riffling through your kid’s toy chest.

RLR says:
March 5, 2009 at 2:23 pm

I still buy CDs, and I avoid buying most current e-music. MP3, AAC, and the rest of the codecs are still lossy. Plus, with a CD I can always rerip and reencode to a new format without losing a single bit.

When they start selling FLACs, then I’m in.

Rob says:
March 5, 2009 at 2:44 pm

Meh. I’ll miss my Virgin Megastore (The one over in Orlando). It was a short walk away from where I worked, I got discounts, they always a good supply of fun books (Including a slew of Lileks books) and they had good coffee.
**Jerry Ray** says:
March 5, 2009 at 4:20 pm

Now that you mention it, Rob, I remember buying _The Gallery of Regrettable Food_ at the Times Square Virgin Megastore during a NYC vacation a few years ago. My girlfriend and I took turns reading it aloud in the hotel room at night, handing it to each other when we started laughing too hard to continue reading.

---

**Emily** says:
March 5, 2009 at 6:41 pm

I want realism Barbies.

Student Barbie (she had to get to all those careers somehow). Student Barbie has a backpack full of books and eight papers to finish.

Newlywed Barbie. She and Ken aren't talking because of what he said about her cooking.

New Mother Barbie. Her waist is non-existent and she never gets to sleep.

Yeah, I know. The girls will never go for those.

---

**Dave (in MA)** says:
March 5, 2009 at 8:19 pm

*Never a mother, to my knowledge. Which is its own sort of propaganda, when you think about it.*

If Barbie had a kid, it'd probably look like GI Joe, because Ken, well… you know.

---

**Bill** says:
March 6, 2009 at 3:42 am

One thing to note about Virgin's demise is that they weren't UNprofitable, but rather that, even in this market, the owner of the store's locations realized they could make more money leasing the spaces to another tenant rather than continue to run Virgin.

So while the stores weren't hemorrhaging money like say, GM, it's entertaining when in the middle of a recession you can still make more money leasing real estate out to other tenants than by keeping the store currently occupying the space open.

The slots Virgin occupied in San Francisco and Denver are fairly prominent ones, so I don't doubt they'll be filled fairly quickly, to say nothing of the NYC location.

That piece having been said, I pity the future of music.

Yes, I'm one of those who believes LP CAN (doesn't ALWAYS, but under ideal conditions CAN) sound better than CDs, but there's no doubt that MP3s sound WORSE than CDs. Except for brief flings with 8-track and cassette, this is the first time a music format is being superseded by one that actually sounds WORSE.

In an era when the studio decks on which recordings are mastered arguably have never sounded better, the distribution medium is sounding worse.

I believe there's unappreciated irony in that.
I find myself in the strange position of saying I have nothing to offer this morning – odd because I have a 3,000 word screed ready to roll for later, and a big bounteous multimedia site addition that LAYS BARE the roots of modern journalism. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, Friday's column can be found at startribune.com – give it a read. It's about America's Gloomiest Cities. Morning topic, if you'd like:

Things that bring you daily joy.

So: Lance Lawson at buzz.mn around 11 AM, Screed at noon, 100 Mysteries at one or so. That'll do. Right?

38 RESPONSES TO friday, march 06

Bill Walsh says:
March 6, 2009 at 12:15 am

All I can say, on behalf of, you know, the world, is thanks for everything!

Oh, and you're totally right about First Wave. It's gotten a lot
poppier. I don't know why. It used to be New Order, Gary Numan, Elvis Costello, the Smiths. Now it's Bronski Beat and Men Without Hats. Lamé, as they say in France.

**MaryIndiana** says:
March 6, 2009 at 12:34 am

I cannot wait for the Screed. I don't know what it will be about, but I am sure you will hit the nail on the head... you always have so far, imho.

**Mumblix Grumph** says:
March 6, 2009 at 12:56 am

*That'll do, right?*

Yes... in fact it's more than we deserve or have any right to expect.

Thanks for doing this for all these years.

**hpoulter** says:
March 6, 2009 at 4:54 am

For today's allotment of free entertainment, and the prospect of much more in the offing, much thanks.

**Fred Pennsylvania** says:
March 6, 2009 at 6:40 am

*Things that bring me daily joy?*

That'd be you, James.

Seriously, I turn to Drudge first each day. I take as much as I can stand. Today, it was just a single short news piece in which the woman who didn't get to run for president in the party that won't let Americans drill for oil on American soil lectures us on how **now** is the time to take steps to reduce foreign energy dependence.

Then I turn, whimpering, to the Bleat for a hearty helping of of you... news about the daughter you love so much, your various out-and-aboutings, now and in decades past. A sharp eye, a well-turned phrase, a witty observation. I usually enjoy a laugh or two, and often find excerpts to email along to friends (always with the link embedded, you'll be glad to know — least I can do for a fellow writer).

Your work is a reliable oasis in my morning, the written and illustrated counterpart to a good cuppa Joe in launching my day. So thanks. Thanks a **lot**!

**swschrad** says:
March 6, 2009 at 6:52 am

the twin cities are NOT one of the gloomiest cities.

right. look outside today.

it's march 6th, and the forecast says once we get past a threat tomorrow, snow through wednesday.

have to fix my supply and pressure issues, and I might add similar
ones in the plumbing for the new tub (yuk yuk) and we might power through the rest of the bathroom refit.

**Bryan** says:
March 6, 2009 at 7:05 am

James-
I was hoping we could get your take on that New New Deal logo President Obama came up with. I know nothing about logos and you always seem to pick out neat stuff that I miss.

**HunkyBob** says:
March 6, 2009 at 7:36 am

“So: Lance Lawson at buzz.mn around 11 AM, Screed at noon, 100 Mysteries at one or so. That’ll do. Right?”

Oh ya, you betcha, sure.

Things that bring joy … This week, not much, except for the little time I spend with a kitten we got, the prospect that things will get better, and that no matter what, this country will come back. People will get so fed up with being told how much we as a country suck, that we have to do more with less, and that our best days are behind us that we will flip them the collective bird and do what we want, because there are things worth fighting for. I’m optimistic.

**Ernie Davis** says:
March 6, 2009 at 7:42 am

I've been waiting for a new screed to sink my teeth into. Perhaps I like my red meat too much, but nobody can write a screed like you, can’t wait! One of my favorites (below) is an occasional tagline for my e-mails. People, or at least the people I e-mail, love it.

“Among the wise and brave in the west, the Red Scare and the Eisenhower Golfocracy will remain the go-to era for the modern Dark Ages, a time when talented, witty people couldn’t glibly support a collectivist blood-soaked totalitarian system without fear their boss might get the wrong idea.”

**Aaron** says:
March 6, 2009 at 7:47 am

You had me at 'screed'.

Sorry to be the one to break the news, ok, no I'm not, but in the big fancy column on the high falutin' newspaper site … 'You’ll want to know if we made the list, and I'm loathe to tell you.' … it's 'loath', not 'loathe'. Unless you were trying a play on words which I flat out missed.

I agree with Fred PA … your work is a welcome escape from the bitter realities of just about each and every day … thanks for all you do.

**Gray Hackle** says:
March 6, 2009 at 7:54 am

Yes, indeedy. I concur with everyone. James, you are my first read at 8:30 every morning. Sometimes the only bright spot in my day.
Karla Duffy says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:08 am

Fred Pennsylvania & HunkyBob – thank you. I KNEW I would regret it if I didn’t read the Bleat first, but y’all have turned my mood right around. Thank you again!

Moishe3rd says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:13 am

Hello People, I’m a Readaholic…
What the…??
For those who are, indeed, addicted to a Lileks buzz in the AM, I just discovered that by clicking on one of the Links of “Your Host, Elsewhere,” you can find new bizarre and wonderful things. Such as clicking on the Youtube link.
James did a hauntingly familiar video piece on being a Readaholic. It's great!
And, being that it appears to have been made back in the Dark Ages Before Political Correctness, he, and others, smoke cigarettes throughout the production.
Just Amazing… Have a Great Day!

Bonnie_ says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:40 am

Yes, Lileks is one of my daily joys. The funny thing is, our Bleat Champion probably had no idea that he was serving up a nice softball for compliments. But there it is, and I'm smacking it.

You, sir, are a daily joy.

HockeyMom says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:40 am

Well, any day on this side of the grass is a good day, but I find joy in the colors of the early morning sky and, of course, in the various musings of Mr. Lileks in different venues throughout the day.

Leslie in AZ says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:48 am

Thanks, James~

Travis says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:57 am

And still…

No Diner.

The world waits. I haven't had a Jubel in weeks!!

Chris M says:
March 6, 2009 at 9:07 am

Bacon and Eggs.
boblipton says:
March 6, 2009 at 9:37 am

James, you have a good day, enjoy life, deal with family and friends, get some work done and I’ll enjoy the Screed and look forward to whatever you have to say on Monday. Your ramblings and natterings and other offerings are a gift to those of us who read them and, if we don’t say thank you as often as we, perhaps should, we are all grateful for whatever efforts you choose to grace us with.

Bob

Henry Halloway says:
March 6, 2009 at 9:40 am

James —

I’ve been a Lileks fanboy for a long time. Your mention of what’s wrong with journalism brings this bit of data this morning — the Seattle PI will be shutting down the presses and becoming web-only if no buyer can be found by 3/10/09. Management is going around asking staff if they want to be part of the website. One of the people they asked spilled the beans about the offer.

“He said the offer increased his health insurance cost, cut his salary by an unspecified amount, offered to match his 401(k) contributions, required him to forgo his P-I severance pay, reduced his vacation accrual to zero and required him to give up overtime.”

Yikes.

Except for the tech-staff, I doubt anyone at your paper has been more forward-thinking about the web as you. It seems likely your paper is headed down the same path, and when the presses stop — if they had any sense — they’d put you in charge of their web edition, with an increase in salary and a bar of gold dropped on your doorstep every month. Don’t settle for less.

RebeccaH says:
March 6, 2009 at 9:43 am

The things that bring me joy?

Checking out my favorite online sites, which are many and varied. The Bleat, of course, is at the top of my bookmark list, as are buzz.mn and the Screedblog.

Other things: That my daughter came through her surgery on Wednesday just fine, and does not have cancer. Any time I can spend with my grandchildren. Sculpting with polymer clay, or carving wood, or painting. Sitting in the sun on my deck, listening to the birds. Weeding the flowerbeds. No, seriously.

Those are just some of the things, and thanks for reminding me to think about them.

Susan says:
March 6, 2009 at 10:00 am

Ditto on the above-mentioned comments. Thanks, Bleatman, for my daily mental “cuppa joe”. These days, we need it more than ever.
Ella says:
March 6, 2009 at 10:24 am

Some mornings, everything is perfect. I wake up, and the pillow is perfectly fitted to my head, and the sheets are soft, and the comforter makes me the right level of warm, and the sun is peeking over the window sill, but it's not totally bright yet. That's the perfect moment of comfort there.

Actually, this morning was like that, so it's a good day. 😊

And no matter what, I like a nice glass of iced tea every morning. Five minutes of relaxation right there, and it gets me ready for the day.

Chris says:
March 6, 2009 at 10:47 am

That'll do, pig. That'll do.

DaveInAz says:
March 6, 2009 at 10:48 am

I found James at the BackFence a dozen years ago, and since that time I've attempted to read every word he writes. I have no idea how someone can be so prolific, so knowledgeable, so observant, so consistent and so creative.

Were I to relate my full admiration for him, I'd be seen as a blubbering fool. Which, of course, James would point out as an idiot covered in whale fat, and we'd all appreciate the image.

Thank you, kind sir. And thank you for the opportunity to post and thereby show our appreciation for your work over these many years.

juanito - John Davey says:
March 6, 2009 at 11:05 am

Screed. Yes. I'm feelin' it. I am receptive to wrapping my arms around a big ole' bucket of screediness. Embrace it.

Something is slamming on eo fmy networks, and of course it's the big one. And of course it's inside the LAN. Port Scanning like mad at the moment. Damn users.

I do recall one of the tenets of programming: User = Enemy.

MamaFish says:
March 6, 2009 at 11:09 am

My daily joys? Well, your writings, of course, as so many before me have all ready stated. Other than that...my children and grandchildren. Coffee. A really well made omelet (when I can get one). A clean house (though I detest slogging through the work to make it happen). A good book. A good movie. A phone call from a friend. A colorful sunset. The changing view outside my window as I type each day. My cats (particularly when they are in full purr-snuggle mode).

Thanks for all the smiles you've given us through the years, Mr. Lileks. -salutes-
miriam says:
March 6, 2009 at 11:54 am

I, too, start my Internet day with your blog. I enjoy reading about your daughter and her growing up. Cherish every moment, because the childhood years go by at warp speed. I know what I'm talking about. I have two daughters, both grown and gone. But they are now more than daughters, they are friends.

Daily joys: my grandsons, who are growing fast.

a reader says:
March 6, 2009 at 3:19 pm

Where is the screed? Maybe he meant noon in Alaska.

Steeev says:
March 6, 2009 at 3:33 pm

Ms. FreezerLady at the top of the Bleat has been bringing me joy all week — hubba hubba! Something about her just pushes my buttons. Probably the eyebrows.

Wendy says:
March 6, 2009 at 5:22 pm

Screed! Screed! Screed!

jcpederson says:
March 6, 2009 at 6:32 pm

I agree with Travis. I feel like an ungrateful wretch for wishing for another Diner podcast, but there it is.

If you do another one before the oncoming hiatus, that's fine; if not, I'll have my Jubal in the summer, nice and cold.

Dan Holway says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:32 pm

All this slobbering Lileks-love needs a counterpoint. I checked the Bleat this morning, and I saw that the long-anticipated Screed was going to be delayed until noon. (Noontime where? Greenwich? Greenland? Green Bay?) I pleaded to the heavens while pounding my fists on the keyboard, “What the hell is he waiting for? Is he making sure that the markets aren't shooting up before he posts about how they're going down?” Resigned to my Screedless morning, I went to work (an actual job where I actually work, as opposed to yukking it up and making silly videos and scanning old newspapers) assuming that I'd get a new Screed when I got home from my eleven hour day. And what was waiting for me when I got home, exhausted and hungry? Well, a few things...but no Screed! That really frosts my bonnet! The mere fact that I am publicly admitting that I wear a bonnet shows how miffed I am. Cancel my subscription!

Kensington says:
March 6, 2009 at 8:48 pm

Aw c'mon, James! Where's the screedy goodness? Don't back down
now! Let ’er rip!

Lileks says:
March 6, 2009 at 9:23 pm

Coming up – still tweaking. Had to go bowling, you know.😊

Kensington says:
March 7, 2009 at 12:20 am

NO BOWLING! It will dilute the screedy goodness.
You have to hold the hate close in order to nurture it, James.😊

zefal says:
March 7, 2009 at 2:05 am

Mr. Lileks,
I can’t find your Christmas Screed could you post a link to it?
Thanks.

Twiga says:
March 7, 2009 at 9:44 pm

Dear J.L.: Do the ‘roots of Modern Journalism’ which you will ‘LAY BARE!’ need help from Adorn, and the Bikini Brush? They’ve been using lye and lie for long now. I bet your Screed will contain ‘NYT’, ‘Duranty’ and ‘Pulitzer’, probably in the same sentence. Best, GFT

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Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!

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A few highly recommended friends...

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1: Matchbook Museum
2: Comic Covers
3: Black & White World
4: Sears 1934
5: Comic ads
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Institute of Official Cheer
Lint: the Institute Tumblr
PopCrush
Screedblog
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StarTribune Column

ARCHIVES
All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
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WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

MORE
Thanks for dropping by!
Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Short work for the morning note. Murderous mood most of the day, slightly leavened when my daughter gave me instructions on “how not to be glum.” Think of happy things you want to do, like go to Disneyland or eat pizza! Both are entirely possible, so yes, that helps. A bit. I’ll be back later with a large Black and White World post – hey, don’t complain; in the old Bleat on a day like this that would have been most of the daily entry – as well as another Uncle Six comic cover update, and the Small Town Website of the Week at buzz.mn.

Right now I need to watch “24” and then go to bed, for Tuesday is Anchor Duty Day at the Newsbreak. Updates on Twitter as more joy unfurls. Of course, there’s always the Twitter page to recap yesterday, such as it was.

Oh: here’s a picture of a fine iron hinge latch. When I was a kid they looked like robot ducks. Still do.
31 RESPONSES TO tuesday, march 10

Tony says:
March 10, 2009 at 12:41 am

My word. That is a fine hinge.

GardenStater says:
March 10, 2009 at 5:09 am

That's no hinge. It's a latch. And it's not iron, it's steel.

Lord, but I'm in a disputatious mood this morning. Wish I could just go back to bed.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
March 10, 2009 at 6:42 am

That thing could put an eye out.

Joe the Painter says:
March 10, 2009 at 6:48 am

Not to go Off The Path or badger, but I was wondering where that Screed scheduled for NOON LAST FRIDAY might be?

It's always so refreshing to hear an articulate, sensible man rant... Besides, you promised...

Lileks says:
March 10, 2009 at 7:19 am

You're right; it was late. And now it's early! It just never ends.
s_k says:
March 10, 2009 at 7:21 am

Unhinged. Provide your own context.

Joe the Painter says:
March 10, 2009 at 7:28 am

Regarding that gate latch, it's much too complex looking...Bolt an air-cooled barrel and a tripod to it and you'd have a fairly convincing 50mm antipersonnel machine gun...

My gates always worked wonderfully...For the first year...Then the elements would take over, gateposts warping, hardware sagging, moisture doing it's evil work, ensuing years of swearing like Ralphy's Old Man trying to get it to open and close...Ah, the simple stuff!!

Cuneo says:
March 10, 2009 at 7:45 am

Now that I look at the profile it does look like a duck. Maybe one could create a swimming duck like a Mr. Machine, the windup robot (action figure?) with all the gears visible.

Bill Peschel says:
March 10, 2009 at 8:15 am

Sounds like its time for an online Fight Club. I was in a horrible mood yesterday, but poured it into my writing. Fortunately, I wasn't writing book reviews.

Scotto says:
March 10, 2009 at 8:24 am

No wonder you're glum. Stop watching 24. That'll depress anyone.

Scotto says:
March 10, 2009 at 8:28 am

Addendum.

If you insist on watching "24", follow it with a chaser of "The Big Bang Theory". Funniest sitcom I've seen in a long time. That should de-funkify you.

Bonnie_ says:
March 10, 2009 at 8:37 am

Hm, must be something going on, because I was unsatisfied with everything yesterday, too. "Unsatisfied" as in "want to destroy anything that crosses my path."

Years ago, I recall one day at work when everyone was grouchy, touchy, and generally full of dissatisfaction. My friend and I had a thought, so we researched weather patterns and got the cold chills when we realized our suspicions might be correct.

It was fourteen days after Chernobyl.
a reader says:
March 10, 2009 at 9:52 am

Face it, there is no screed coming.

GardenStater says:
March 10, 2009 at 10:12 am

The screed will arrive along with several Official Solutions. Patience, Grasshopper.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 10, 2009 at 10:17 am

When I was younger and would get in “murderous” moods, that is usually when I would lose my current job. I usually quit, only fired once by an idiot who got himself fired within a month of firing me.

Now I have the internet to put me in whatever mood I think I need to be in to get over the mood swing and save my job. Better than drugs and alcohol.

Moishe3rd says:
March 10, 2009 at 10:18 am

Cheer up! It's Purim!
This is the Jewish holiday where one drinks enough to not be able to tell the difference between Cursed Be Haman and Blessed Be Mordechai!

How can one be unhappy in Lileks Land? A Land of Retro Black and White Comicbookia Matchbooks that focus on Ephemeral Minneapolis? Here – Life is Beautiful All the Time. A Freilichin Purim to All those living inside The Bleat for all of these years.

GardenStater says:
March 10, 2009 at 10:48 am

Happy Purim to you, too, Moishe!

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 10, 2009 at 10:51 am

and Aaron Go Bris, hic

GardenStater says:
March 10, 2009 at 11:13 am

Bgbear, you crack me up!

JerseyAmy says:
March 10, 2009 at 12:01 pm

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!
Say, that looks just like my latch! On my gate! You were skulking around my house, weren't you? Oh, wait, the neighborhood beyond the gate looks nothing like my neighborhood. And I'd like to think that we New Jerseyans are done with the snow this year. (Of course now I've just cursed us, sorry GardenStater.)

Happy Purim Moishe! Though I'm a Gentile, a holiday involving drinking sounds good to me right now.

**Joe Sixpack** says:
March 10, 2009 at 12:32 pm

Man, I miss the old website. This is awful. Between the incessant twittering, the buzz.mn site, and this *thing*, the quality of the bleat has definitely gone downhill. It doesn't seem as reflective; it's not quite logorrhea. It's hardly funny. It's not screedy. It's worse than Facebook posts. Shame, really.

**Lileks** says:
March 10, 2009 at 2:13 pm

Well, Joe, to use the modern argument construction for deflecting criticism, I understand your complaints, but I disagree. Also, I'm not sure I do understand. There's no twitter on this page. (For the moment.) Don't like it? Don't read. Buzz.mn has been going on for a while – it's one of my paying jobs, after all. (and this is voluntary.) The amount of content is the same, if not greater – I'm just breaking up one Big Thing into two or three posts, with extra posts to highlight new site additions, and those haven't slackled in numbers.

I did this to A) add comments, B) provide better permalinks, C) tag and categorize the content, and D) allow me to write the thing at night and fire it off in parts throughout the day.

Facebook? *Shame*? Oh, come on. Really.

**MaryIndiana** says:
March 10, 2009 at 3:14 pm

Good Night Nurse! What is wrong with everyone today?

**roger h (bgbear)** says:
March 10, 2009 at 4:09 pm

I have been reading the Bleat for about 9 years and I think this is the best version yet. Even when James does not have time to respond, there are numerous readers who can chime in and expand on the topic.

My only complaint is that it is distracting and I have to get back to work.

😊

**GardenStater** says:
March 10, 2009 at 4:30 pm

I agree with bgbear. I've loved reading the Bleat ever since I got linked to the Art Frahm section from The Straight Dope web page. One of the things I really like about the new format is the opportunity for comments. 'Cause some of you are doggone funny!
Joe Sixpack says:
March 10, 2009 at 5:50 pm

Oh come on, Mr. Lileks – you cannot be obtuse like this.

To clarify: Because you are not concentrating your efforts when you write the Bleat, it now appears haphazard and lacks the quality of your earlier work. Since the Star Tribune started having trouble, and perhaps before, and you've been diversifying, it's diluted this product. This is understandable; some or all of the product will have to suffer. But I've tried to distill this into some semblance of the Bleat I used to read and have been unsuccessful. I'm sure there's moer content, but I'd rather see more quality of content. Perhaps it is just me.

(Judging by the sometimes sycophantic nature of your commenters, perhaps it is.)

Heaven forbid a comment section should involve some amount of debate.

I too have been reading the Bleat since 2001 and have followed Mr. Lileks's career and life from that time. I think we have to agree to disagree that the quality of the Bleat has been diminished as of late.

As an aside, if Mr. Lileks worked at 2000 Penn, I probably drank beer in the same bar as he did (the Red Lion). Shame I didn't know you then.

Lileks says:
March 10, 2009 at 7:30 pm

I don't mind debate, Joe, and if you're disappointed, I'm sorry. But calling it Facebook and expecting I should feel shame is a bit much, no?

cnyguy says:
March 10, 2009 at 7:37 pm

It took me a while to get used to the new and improved Bleat, but I'm always slow to warm to change. The important thing is that Lileks is still Lileks– the style and humor remain the same, and that's what really counts. The Bleat content continues along essentially the same lines it always has, only there's more of it. How can that be a bad thing?


GardenStater says:
March 10, 2009 at 10:10 pm

Hey, at least James checks these comments more often than he does at Buzz.mn! Be grateful for small favors!

(And keep up the good work, Jimmy boy!)

Moishe3rd says:
March 10, 2009 at 10:33 pm

I LOVE the new Bleat!
And I have also been reading since... ?? Backfence or before... I don't remember. Since the time when every time I sent an email to Mr. Lileks on something he wrote, he would respond...
Don’t Worry. Be Happy. A Freilichin Purim to all!

Ross says:
March 11, 2009 at 1:56 am

I’ll tell you one thing I miss: that bit of artwork James had as the Bleat header a while back of the swank ’50s modernist house, with the guests arriving for a soiree. Something about that picture made it a small, but welcome, bit of visual escapism for me. Still, our critic friend will probably be won over eventually (or his objections aren’t strong enough to keep him away) – like cnyguy & me, he’s probably just not real good with change. I’m not exactly Adrian Monk, but it takes me a while, as well.
Woke in the middle of the night, checked the clock: 4:12. Good. That meant I had three hours of REM under the belt, and I’d have three more if I didn’t start thinking. But I wanted to start thinking. I’d had a fascinating dream. I played it reverse, from its complex ending back to the moment where it began: a waiter threw bread at me. The dream had ended up as a mob hit. In the middle it was a TV sitcom. The waiter was the son of a mobster. It was the Sopranos as a sitcom, but it still ended with blackness and death.

I laid there for a minute, listening to the pipes sigh in the basement, then BEEP BEEP BEEP. Three hours later. The requirements of the new position require an alarm that means business, that brooks no vague state between sleep and awake, so the old Andromeda-Strain alarm has been turned off for the duration. I set two alarms; the second is a horrible thing that sounds like someone’s beating a root budgie with a hammer. If I turn off the first one I don’t have to hear the second. UP. I felt rested – it’s odd how you can gauge the quality of time spent unconscious simply by the state you assume upon leaving the previous state. You can be out for eight hours, but if the dreams are full of old horrors or sol-mo quicksand runs up an endless staircase, you know it.

My dreams never worry me. It’s the ones that dissolve a few minutes after you wake that bother me – but that’s probably the mind’s way of keeping you from thinking about all the dreams you never remember. Every morning we awake, we burn a storehouse with thousand movies.
Downstairs. Coffee on. Put the sausage in the microwave, get the paper, pour the cereal, get the sausage, daub some fire-red Rooster sauce on the sizzling patty, wonder why we never call anything else a Patty unless it's a hamburger, eat, drink coffee. Upstairs to the computer: eight minutes to scan the wire while shaving. Shower and out by 7:39.

I like this. It's meant the end of the late-night typing session for a while, and it also means I don't get to walk Natalie to the bus stop. But it's not every day. En route to work I listen to loud 80s music while drinking coffee from a plastic disposable cup. Problem: the cup does not match the car. The metallic coffee mug did, but coffee tasted like hobo-sweat coming out of that thing, and drinking through the tiny aperture was a guarantee of a blister on the tongue-tip. For some reason this styrofoam cup makes coffee relax. It's eminently drinkable. And it's disposable!

You take your small moments of rebellion where you can.

Work! As I noted below, we slam this NewsBreak together at high speed – about 90 minutes between the news huddle to shooting. Frant-o-type extreme. I enjoyed this installment. Afterwards I went out to feed the meter, and saw my old friend Charleston Blueman:

He was my happy anti-recession brainless maniac for a while, but he's been glum and haggard lately. His yellow hair is ratty, and something's wrong with his blower.

Man, even the advertising inflatables are assuming metaphorical postures.
Buck up, pal.

**Back to work.** Later, I picked up Natalie at the bus stop at the appointed time – the KILLER STORM had not struck; I could make it to the bus stop without tying twine to the handrail at the bottom of the steps so we feel our way home. I made her hot chocolate and got back to work. Hit the links. Hmm:

Time magazine has a list of the ten most endangered newspapers.

That's interesting, because our paper had a list of the ten most endangered magazines named Time. Seems like a duel on a Titanic lifeboat before it's winched down the side, no?

Or not. I remain enthusiastic about the paper's survival, for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with the pleasant sound my whistling makes as it echoes off the tombstones. I do think we'll survive. Newsmagazines, less so. I can't remember the last time I bought one. Not even after 9/11 – even by then the desire to remember an event with a glossy print recap had vanished, especially since Newsweek has this as its cover the month after the event:

August 2011
July 2011
June 2011
May 2011
April 2011
March 2011
February 2011
January 2011
December 2010
November 2010
October 2010
September 2010
August 2010
July 2010
June 2010
May 2010
April 2010
March 2010
February 2010
January 2010
December 2009
November 2009
October 2009
September 2009
August 2009
July 2009
June 2009
May 2009
April 2009
March 2009
February 2009
January 2009
HOST WITH THE MOST
I remember looking at that, and thinking, well, we can convert; that would help a little. I figured it had something to do with supporting Israel, getting involved in Middle East wars, and being infidels. Maybe large rallies formed around a fervent hatred of our tendency to cancel good TV shows before they really have a chance, or because we never apologized for New Coke, or because we went to the Moon and didn't bring back a present from the airport gift shop for everyone, or whatever other reason, but it seemed unlikely.

Didn't buy it. Hadn't bought it for a while. I think the last time I looked at a newsmagazine, it was full of things that were Generally Wrong or Growing Concerns or Worrisome Trends, with lots of ads for acid-reflux pills. The default mode of these magazines a long time ago seemed to be banging the tocsin with a bloody shirt, to horribly mix metaphors, and it's not surprising; the default position of journalism is reminding us how far we live from the fabled borders of Utopia, and how we might speed the journey through the magic accelerating powers of wise, targeted legislation.

I interviewed a Famous Columnist once who trotted out the “comfort the afflicted, afflict the comfortable” line – he was quite comfortable himself, which made you wonder if he went home and pinched himself until bloody
half-moons appeared on his forearms – and he said he had a deep-seated need to throw snowballs at the guys with top hats. So... you're a 30s urchin in Brooklyn?

At heart, probably. G'wan, ya swell! Go eat sum oysters, why doncha? First he writes the story about scrappy urchins who throw snowballs at top hats; the next year the style section writes about the decline in top-hat popularity, because of the snowball problem – which is understandable, given income inequality, and really, they are a bit passe – and the next year the columnist writes a story about the guys who are out of work because the top-hat factory closed. Meanwhile, the business section has a big story on a new straw-boater factory. But it's the columnist grousing about the factory closing that people remember.

You can't avoid being tagged as habitual downers when you're in the news business, because the Truth Hurts, or at least Hurts Someone Else – but sometimes I suspect many people in the news business are temperamentally predisposed to miserabilism, because the idea of an unjust world run by monied smileys explains why the cheerleader turned them down for a date in high school. But I know too many who don't fit that mold. So ignore the above, except when it seems to explain something. Except when you read someone who seems to think that by afflicting the comfortable, the afflicted are automatically comforted. As if writing is charity.

Later today: Out of Context Ad Challenge, around 11 or so, if I get out of a meeting; an enormous 27 page remake of an old website, with marvellous old photos. Miscreant Round-up at buzz.mn.

Also, this promise: screed and Diner before the week's over. I can say that because one's done, and the other's all in my head. Like a dream.

39 RESPONSES TO wednesday, march 11

bk69 says:
March 11, 2009 at 1:45 am

Why, surely the attitude of the journalist you interviewed is an anomaly, and certainly indicative of the profession as a whole.

Or maybe not:

But I'm not sure whether I should feel afflicted that our tax dollars are going to support my local businesses, or comforted that our tax dollars are going to support our local businesses.

Steve Keeley says:
March 11, 2009 at 2:06 am
“...we never call anything else a Patty unless it's a hamburger.”

There are York Peppermint Patties.

hpoulter says:
March 11, 2009 at 4:10 am

What the heck is a “root” budgie? I can't decipher that, even as a typo.

Diner coming – Yay team! How do he do it?

Predisposed to miserabilism » Nieman Journalism Lab » Pushing to the Future of Journalism says:
March 11, 2009 at 4:26 am

[…] today's Bleat. This entry was written by Tim Windsor, posted on March 11, 2009 at 4:25 am, and tagged . […]

“Predisposed to miserabilism” — Zero Percent Idle says:
March 11, 2009 at 5:00 am

[…] From today's Bleat. […]

DYSEPSIA GENERATION » Blog Archive » Lileks is on point today, says:
March 11, 2009 at 5:45 am

[…] Read it. You can't avoid being tagged as habitual downers when you're in the news business, because the Truth Hurts, or at least Hurts Someone Else – but sometimes I suspect many people in the news business are temperamentally predisposed to miserabilism, because the idea of an unjust world run by monied smileys explains why the cheerleader turned them down for a date in high school. But I know too many who don't fit that mold. So ignore the above, except when it seems to explain something. Except when you read someone who seems to think that by afflicting the comfortable, the afflicted are automatically comforted. As if writing is charity. […]

swschrad says:
March 11, 2009 at 7:05 am

the Seattle P-I, another fine award-winning paper, is taking the ride to the Styx in days, they have ordered the wheelie bins and renewed the web domain name. that's 4 recently... including Pittsburgh, the Rocky, and last fall, the Christian Science Monitor went web-only.

papers have always started and died, merfed and faded, but we're losing the giants.

newsmagazines have really been goners for years... even when there's a good article at the doctor's office that they don't let me finish, it's a page. nothing in depth, a page or two.

yes, I think I will take my megabank stock to the market, and invest in paper makers. And car companies. I can sure pick 'em on wall street.
It’s a shame about the Seattle P.I. They cooked their own goose by going full out lefty. Oh well.

Check out the cool “Daily Planet” signage they have on the building.


MaryIndiana says:
March 11, 2009 at 7:14 am

Time Magazine was a staple around the house when I was growing up. I am not really sure when it happened, but at some point it was no longer a serious news magazine. It became this odd...news tabloid. Heavy on the photos, with short and meaningless articles.

I switched to The Economist in college and got my Dad a subscription as well. He was thrilled that there was still a weekly magazine out there that wasn’t “8th grade level trash”.

R.I.P. Time Magazine

Baby M says:
March 11, 2009 at 7:51 am

Was the Post-Intelligencer post-intelligent? It would explain a great deal.

No One of Consequence says:
March 11, 2009 at 7:52 am

“There are York Peppermint Patties.”

And let’s not forget the staple of school cafeterias everywhere – the chicken patty

Gray Hackle says:
March 11, 2009 at 7:56 am

‘explains why the cheerleader turned them down for a date in high school’

Which, I think explains some people’s current attitudes. And some rabid feminist’s chip on her shoulder. Or maybe most. A lousy social life in high school predisposes one to a life of resentment or at least congenital grumpiness and envy.

Nancy says:
March 11, 2009 at 8:05 am

I love your description of the state of journalism. I think you are right about the cheerleader-rejection-syndrome. I must admit I found your final disclaimer rather funny—“But I know too many who don’t fit that mold. So ignore the above, except when it seems to explain something.” It sort of matches the attitude people have toward their Congressional delegation. “Throw the bums out of office!” except of course mine, because they’re OK. In their defense I imagine there are plenty of journalists out there laboring to maintain their
principles in the face of editorial fiat.

Richard Durbin says:
March 11, 2009 at 8:19 am

There's the kind of cow paddies that have nothing to do with beef....

I was in high school in the late 70's and early 80's and was a voracious reader of newspapers. Unfortunately I noticed that when a paper did a story on a subject I actually knew about, they were ALWAYS wrong in important ways.

That shot their credibility with me. I didn't even notice the partisanship until the 00's.

Ever since HS, when ever i saw a story that i was interested in, in the paper, I took that as a cue to research the subject myself as best I could. Typically they were still always wrong at best, and often misrepresented to skew to a preconceived point.

Maybe the loss of advertising would have killed newspapers anyway, but their lack of credibility is what's finally doing them in.

shesnailie says:
March 11, 2009 at 8:39 am

_@_v – why do they hate us? because they can. the arab/islamic world has the courage of a lion when it comes to standing up the the straw man know, as us imperialist hegemony™ but shrieks like a little girl with acid thrown in her face when it comes to standing up for themselves against the tyranny of their own government or local mullah because it's one thing to stand up against someone you know damn well isn't going to hit you back but quite another to stand up to someone fully prepared to detach limbs of yours or your family's.

Mike Gebert says:
March 11, 2009 at 8:46 am

Yeah, I traded up from Newsweek to The New Republic and so on a long time ago. Figuring they might be thinner, but there was real inside info/policy meat in those magazines.

Now they're no longer thinner…

jeischen says:
March 11, 2009 at 9:08 am

I also grew up with Time magazine. Arrived in the mailbox every Wednesday and I read it cover to cover each week for years. My initial reason for reading it was because it had great combat photos from the Vietnam War. By the time it went all “USA Today” and coverage of important events was replaced by trite four-page pieces on vapid Hollywood stars, I had long since quit reading it. Last time I picked one up, it was about the same heft as a direct mailer for a time share condo. Gotta agree about the left-wing slant being the downfall of many newspapers and newsmags. When you already know what the article is going to say before you read the first paragraph, what's the point? I also think a little bit of investigative journalism may have staved off some of this economic crisis. Instead, they spent the last two years playing press flak for a presidential campaign.
aez says:
March 11, 2009 at 9:13 am

Thank you, thank you, thank you... for continuing to Bleat, in addition to all the other angles. Splendid to start the day with.

Karla Duffy says:
March 11, 2009 at 9:14 am

Camping at Bike Week in Daytona one year, our morning chef (and neighbor back here at home) fixed the best scrambled eggs & a new discovery of his – HAM Patties! With a song and dance number (to the tune of Jim Stafford's "Cow Patty") that was hysterical.

Thanks for the reminder!

Bill Peschel says:
March 11, 2009 at 9:22 am

We had a longtime sub to Newsweek until we let it go last year, for pretty much the same reason. The lefty politics seeped into everything. Even Conde Nast Traveler can't seem to get through an article without some kind of Bush-bashing.

If you want to measure the distance between what newsmagazines used to be and what they are now, hie thee down to the library and pick up the Canadian newsmagazine McLeans'. Perhaps your Canadian readers can detect its biases, but it seems far more readable, far more interesting and far funnier (intentionally I mean) than Time or Newsweek. Except for their love of Obama, but that's the default nowadays, isn't it?

juanito - John Davey says:
March 11, 2009 at 9:26 am

Charleston Blueman:

Optimist – It appears to this reader that Chuck is bowing down in homage to the viewer.

Er, well, glass half full I guess.

Pilgrim says:
March 11, 2009 at 9:31 am

Just finished yesterday's NewsBreak with James Lileks. Much, much better than your first one. Hope they continue in this vein, or even get better!

Good observations on journalism today. They just can't crank out enough bad news to stay in business, can they? Even the good news looks bad to them, because, darn it, it wasn't done their way.

JimT says:
March 11, 2009 at 9:40 am

Newsbreak was laugh-out-loud funny, you have plainly found the right tone.

Only one minor critique — the lid of the Macbook blocked the view of your guests, a little distracting.
Al Federber says:
March 11, 2009 at 10:00 am

“If it bleeds, it leads”. What else is there to know about journalism?

JohnW says:
March 11, 2009 at 10:09 am

Back when I was thin and had hair it would take me an entire lunch hour to read one of the weeklies. Today I get free delivery of Newsweek, with all the heft and in-depth content of a Kroger circular, and I'm almost ready to pay a pittance to make them stop.

Joe says:
March 11, 2009 at 10:10 am

A Friday the 13th Diner? Really?! Splendid! Now if only I can keep the locusts at bay long enough to listen.

B Logo says:
March 11, 2009 at 10:10 am

Lileks has done it again, coming up with these fine twisted writings that, simple me has to re-read a number of times even though they make simple logical super humorous sense. Except for the cheerleader part. Why they are miserablists is because the cheerleader turned them down, not the other way around... Or did I misunderstand yet again

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 11, 2009 at 10:26 am

Whenever someone brought up the why do “they hate us” type question, I always remember that line from from “Independence Day” with the president talking to the alien through the Brent Spiner scientist:

President: What do you want us to do?
Alien: Die. Die.

Brian J. Dunn says:
March 11, 2009 at 10:54 am

Ah, vintage Zakaria swill memories. I honestly don't know what planet he's from.

I fled from Time to Newsweek to US News to The Economist as each seemed to settle into comfortable well-to-do liberal viewpoints, oblivious to any other possible view. The Economist is still head and shoulders above the rest, but I can't quite forgive them for endorsing Clinton over Bush I.

I'll set aside some beer and beef for the occasion of a new screed. Afflict those who need afflictin', I say.

Alec says:
March 11, 2009 at 11:01 am

All I know is it's Minneapolis update Wednesday!
MisterFweem says:  
March 11, 2009 at 11:44 am

Spot on, Mr. Lileks. One of the reasons I decided to leave journalism in 2005 is that, for me, the attitude that afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted without really making sure the afflicted are comforted was eating at me too much.

GardenStater says:  
March 11, 2009 at 11:51 am

What about the famous Irish landscape designer, Patty O'Furniture?

rivlax says:  
March 11, 2009 at 1:08 pm

“G’wan, ya swell! Go eat sum oysters, why doncha?”

With oysters pronounced “ersters,” of course.

Nalora says:  
March 11, 2009 at 1:56 pm

I so miss Look magazine. There was something quite wonderful as a kid to sit on the couch with a big magazine filled with fascinating pictures. I recently started looking at Reuter’s photos of the week, but it is just not the same as curling up with a blankie and a 8 oz. coke and LOOK.

Nal

Writeaway says:  
March 11, 2009 at 2:40 pm

Good one GardenStater! Maybe Patty will end up in this week’s Lance Lawson — could be Tiny’s cousin, the latest Victim or DorisRazzer.

Oscar Femur says:  
March 11, 2009 at 9:01 pm

“root budgie”?

Janet Dammit says:  
March 12, 2009 at 6:55 am

I must say, you have made me laugh so much in the past years I just had to say thank you. The blue inflatable squiggly dude photo put me over the top, and I sprayed some coffee at my computer screen. Anyhoodlers...I grew up in Grand Forks, and now I live in Florida. I'd probably freeze solid and die if I tried to go back now. Thanks again. You are full of funny.

Robert says:  
March 12, 2009 at 7:58 am

What on earth is a root budgie? And yes, I did a Google search.
Daniel says:
March 12, 2009 at 10:05 am

Trying to figure out this: “. . . a horrible thing that sounds like someone’s beating a root budgie with a hammer.” I googled and got — the selfsame Bleat. Then I saw this tweet: “I *hate* googling for info and getting my own site as the top response. You feel like Roget looking for another word for thesaurus” and actually factually LOL’d, thank you. But please, please, please where did beating a root budgie with a hammer come from? — I can’t even come up with a plausible autocorrect explanation.
I gave myself five extra minutes to get to work today, expecting the roads to be slick. They weren’t. I ended up at the office five minutes early, listening to “Pop Goes the World” by Men Without Hats. It’s not a bad song. It might be the best thing they ever did, but halfway through you realize oh, my, this is some sort of statement. This might even be a story-song.

It was, of course, a “lost hit.” This I can accept. What makes the morning drive difficult is that Mark Goodman is the host. Is that his name? The MTV guy? The one who always makes you think his co-host should be Bill Todson? I couldn’t stand him then, and now it’s no easier. Martha Quinn was the sorta-cute-after-four-Zimas bouncy perky one who maybe, in a way, reminded you of Jane Wiedlin, but in the end was too much like your best friend’s younger sister who had a crush on you. Downtown Julie Brown was hip and cool and you knew you’d have nothing in common and nothing to talk about, and that wubba-wubba crap was a bucket of cold water all by itself. There was that Alan fellow, who seemed slightly annoyed he was required to do this; Triple-J was good, and even though he appeared to be grandfathered in for old-school DJ gravitas, he fit. Nina Blackwood looked like she smelled of cigarettes, and you were sure her obit would say “biographies claimed she was ten years younger than she actually was.”

And now they’re my companions on the way to, and from, work. Thank you,
Sirius.

After a trying day at work I got in the car, and did not want to listen to anything. The radio was turned all the way down. I looked at the dial: it was set on an AM station. I turned it to XM, because I was paying for it. If I’m not going to listen to something, I want as many options as possible.

A local columnist decided to go after Twitter today. (h/t Julio, via Twitter.) Now, we all love Joe around here, and his afternoon talk show is a ratings powerhouse that stands as the last remaining local example of how you create, build, and keep a radio audience without resorting to sports. No small feat, and detractors are advised to try it themselves before pitching rocks.

Now and again, though, even the ziestiest observer of the scene can slip into onions-on-the-belt territory. I’ve come to expect two kinds of Twitter stories: one written for a mass audience by someone who gets the medium, like the Strib’s Randy Salas, and one written for people who still think the Morse Telegraph ruined the lovely art of hand-written letters.

You see any sealing-wax salesman downtown lately? ‘Course not. I remember when they’d come by with their cart, and you’d pat old dobbin on the nose while discussing Teapot Dome, and ‘ventually you’d get down to whether you wanted the new-fangled smokeless sealing wax or the old bituminous variety. I didn’t like the smokeless style – time was, a man felt his letter was done when the room was full of choking fumes, and when you wiped down the walls a few times a year with a real sponge, not one of those cellulite monstrosities, you felt like you were gathering up the spirits of all the letters you’d sent. Then Tony – that’s what we called him even though he had some other name – would offer to regrind your seal so you’d get a nice imprint, and he’d do it there on the spot. Kids today with their beep-beep-beep telegrams – what can you say in a medium that’s made up of long and short, and charges by the word? As the man said about the telegraph, “What hath God wrought?” Someone said that about the nuclear bomb, too.

But I exaggerate. The column begins:

A couple of editors were on Cedar Street late last summer, female editor types from this newspaper. This was during the Republican National Convention that was such a big success for St. Paul. It was the first time I heard the word ‘Twitter.’

Whatever Twitter was, the gals were terribly excited about it. Waiting for the light to change, I asked them what Twitter was. They could not explain it, at least not in a way that made sense. What I got out of it was that there was a reporter in the Xcel Energy Center and they were in
I used Twitter during the convention as well, broadcasting details to anyone interested. It was fun. And useful: when the Code Pink idiot interrupted a speech, and I got the video, I was able to twitter a link to the video when it hit the web. It's called advertising.

"So, in addition to telephones, e-mail, texting and, considering the proximity of the Xcel, walking back and forth, there is Twitter?"

Basically, at that point, they tuned me out.

Knowing Joe, this was said with a certain amount of acidulous amusement, so yes, basically at that point, etc. But if you're at an event, and you want share a detail, you can't phone everyone. You shouldn't email – that's a medium that's devolved into spam and CRAP YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR WORK or back-and-forth notes between groups of individuals attempting to coordinate something. Texting is narrowcasting; it's a single stone down a well. Twitter is confetti thrown in the air.

Newspapers are dropping to the ground like dry leaves, but on the way down, they are only too happy to celebrate the technologies that, taken together, are one of the main reasons newspapers are dying.

I respectfully disagree. If technologies are bringing down newspapers, it's because newspapers didn't get in front of them earlier. I get news from Twitter – it's always second-hand, but it's a form of information distribution that has something newspapers don't: it usually comes from someone I've followed, so there's a certain simpatico element present in the transaction. Nothing prevented newspapers from using this a year ago. Nothing prevented them from inventing it five years ago.

I now know what Twitter is, by the way. I did some homework. It is nothing. Nothing. It is nothing wrapped in euphemisms, like "networking" or "socializing" or "staying connected in real time."

Oh, I don't know about that. I'm looking at my feed – Andy Ihnatko dealing with an imposter, a few jokes, pithy observations, links from the bloggers who use it to pump out stories, commentary on office life from a fellow reporter. As I said in my own obligatory column on the subject, a portable
box of imaginary friends. People don't seem to engage in torrid napalm flamewars on twitter, at least in my experience, which means that people are still able, at this late date and in this polarized land, able to self-organize around a medium, not a topic or place. (Like talk radio, for example.) “Socializing” – well, it's not meeting down at the bowling alley or at the local bar, but it beats sitting alone in a room. “Staying connected in real time” is what it is, but that really seems the least important aspect of it, and hence one most likely touted by Grand Theorists. It's an aspect, but I really don't care if someone reads a message 20 minutes after I wrote it.

I know what it is. And I now know what must have excited the editors late last summer. Because of Twitter, they were in contact with somebody — somebody they didn’t have to talk to — who was telling them things, like what was for lunch or who was walking by or what Katie Couric’s shoes were like or who happened to be onstage at the moment.

Silly girls! This is entirely different from being on the radio at the convention, and noting that Joe Klein just passed by, and he's short.

That's what Twitter is. Twitter is a means by which you can type some characters on your little screen that says you just changed your shirt, and you send this off in the delusion that other people will find this interesting and maybe Twitter you back by tweeting, “What color?”

You could go all day because after color would come a size and then the material. Oh, what fun.

That last paragraph was only 95 characters! You have 45 to go!

He does note that “Probably, somebody other than the people who invented it — some people in San Francisco — will figure out how to make money using Twitter.” Well, he might ask Julio, who works at the paper, and wrote a book about the topic. He's easily found – by Twitter, email, or carrier pigeon.

Just got a tweet from Bob Collins over at MPR:

The moonrise was so gorgeous tonight I felt like I was driving straight into the opening scene of The Honeymooners.

Made me smile. What's the harm in that?
On the other hand, there's overkill; I suspect any product that attempts to “harness” Twitter for anything. I tried out an iPhone app that touted the concept of “Social Weather” – as opposed to the private, individual weathersphere we currently inhabit. It's a nice weather app, but it contains a pane that collects the weather related tweets of people in your area, based on your phone's location. I cannot tell you how much I really don't care whether 123 people agree that it's cold. This I know. We're in a snap, a trench, a rude brash resurgence of that prickly bastard Winter, and while it's nice to read a few tweets from those I've followed lamenting the krepulous nature of this spell – people I know, and hence can imagine saying the words I read – I don't need a Greek chorus on the subject.

Then I discovered something else: a socially-networked weather-specific tag cloud. I give you: the stupidest thing I have ever seen on my iPhone.
I realize I run the horrible risk of being a stick-in-the-mud fellow who doesn’t have the sense to know that five bees make a quarter, but the epitome of useless information is a chart that tells you people are wearing pants when the temperature is 1 below.

—

**Later today:** a heap of Curious Lucre. Right now: Lance Lawson over at [buzz.mn](http://buzz.mn). See you soon!
57 RESPONSES TO *thursday, march 12*

**Warren** says:
March 12, 2009 at 6:26 pm

> cannot tell you how much I really don't care whether 123 people agree that it's cold. *This I know. We're in a snap, a trench, a rude brash resurgence of that prickly bastard Winter...*

**Recession.** It's just a recession.

**Loge** says:
March 12, 2009 at 6:37 pm

I am of the same mind as Mojo Nixon with regard to Martha Quinn.

**Stephanie Roberts** says:
March 12, 2009 at 6:53 pm

Last night I was considering the irony of 'social networking'. I was at a community theater production, and before the show more than half the audience was tapping away on their personal devices – texting, snapping pictures, maybe twittering, who knows. All I know is so many people had their nose buried in the warm glow of their electronics and not many people were actually talking to each other.

Maybe I have just reached that point where I get all the information I feel like I need when I am online, and I don't need a device in my pocket to keep me hooked up the rest of the time. Sometimes it's nice to walk away from the virtual crowd. My friends say that's a dead-giveaway that I am over 20. Can't argue that. So I guess I'll just hitch up my onions and let the kids do their thing...

**Dave (in MA)** says:
March 12, 2009 at 7:42 pm

It's hard to believe nobody's mentioned *Stuffin' Martha's Muffin* yet.

**Robert** says:
March 12, 2009 at 9:59 pm

One potentially valuable aspect of twitter that I rarely see mentioned. When I evacuated for Gustav (or was it Ike...) I was in almost constant contact with folks from all over New Orleans re: how things were going. You couldn't place a cel phone call, and power was down all over the southern part of Louisiana, but twitter was up and running. I learned far more from my treo than from any other source, and I shared a good bit of information as well.

As James said, it's a broader audience than text messaging, but the character limitation means that the bandwidth requirements are so low that it works even when you can't place a call.

Granted, that situation is not particularly common, even in Louisiana, but it's a bonus if you also enjoy the occasional “banal” twitter from friends, co-workers, or nationally syndicated writers...
Ross says:
March 13, 2009 at 2:16 am

RMc:
Funny, I don’t remember seeing you at the last gathering of the cult. You must have left before the extra bowing & scraping(we gotta elect a better leader next board meeting). Jan Smithers—we are not worthy! But,well, you know– ROWR! — anyway. And, as I’ve said before, the lovely lass atop The Bleat _has_ to be a long-lost Meadows sister(Jane & Audrey, silly—not the missing butler in Chuck Jones’ “The Aristo-Cat”)

Michael Rittenhouse says:
March 13, 2009 at 11:05 am

theweblist.net is one of the best sources of “what's happening.” However, it contains nothing local, still relying — as most of the Web does — on the major national news organizations for original reporting.

There has always been a market for local news. Problem is, no one wanted to pay what it actually costs for a half-dozen or more people to troll an urban area each day, looking for newsworthy information. Advertising had to foot the bill.

I’d love to have the Lileksian job of hunting down local news and features, and reporting them online via video, photo, and print. If only someone or some organization would pay me to do it.
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?
The Sears Tower has been renamed . . . the Willis tower? Really. Why not the Chauncey Pince-Nez Plaza, or the Percy Oh-Dear-My-Stars Center, or something else as weightless as Willis? No offense to any Willises in the audience – all of whom I’m sure call themselves Will, which is more manly and full of Determination – but that is not a name you attach to an enormous structure that looks like the conjoined Saltine-cracker packages of the Gods. It will always be the Sears Tower, and there’s nothing Willis can do about it. Good luck, guys.

The slender heart of Rockefeller Center, for example, will always be the RCA building. It seemed obscene when the name was changed, but the blow was softened by the new moniker: GE. Another venerable name. It’s like Lauren Bacall leaving Bogart for John Wayne – you may not like it, but there’s a certain rude continuity. The PanAm building, though, will never be anything else to me. MetLife means one thing: Snoopy. For all the brutal ruination it wrought on its location, the PanAm is still one hell of a building, cruel and beautiful. You put that thing in any other city 500 years ago, and everyone would worship it. Out of fear. It’s 60s corporatism at its most confident, complete with rooftop heliport so the execs can come and go without laying the soles of their expensive shoes on the common walk of the street below. I love it.

Really:
The Sears Tower is almost unloveable, unless you're a structural engineer. The means by which they kept it from falling over where unique at the time, a “bundled tubes” idea that's manifested by its outward appearance. I suppose it's been noted before, but it looks like the ultimate bureaucratic HQ: stacks of paper piled higher and higher.

This has been a long, long week. One of the more interesting weeks of the year, too. Looking forward to an old-style Friday morning, where I get 30 minutes of private work after dropping off Natalie at the bus stop, and before I get to the work-work. Nothing like turning on an old radio show and resizing graphics, I tell you. Happy as a bivalve in a sea of XENIX.

Actually, Xanax, but that's how the Pages program corrected the word. I never used previous versions of Pages because it didn't have auto-correct. This one does, but it's unforgiving. And fast. It brooks no argument. YOU MEANT THIS. It corrects Taliban as Tailbone, for example – not a bad call. That's the general vicinity, yes.

So, what have I done today? Well, I wrote a column. Should have written it last night, but I knew I had to get some quotes, and there would be time, so I watched part of “French Connection 2.” The first one has the famous chase: Popeye Doyle driving beneath the el to follow a guy on a train. The second one, which takes place in France, ends with Doyle chasing, on foot, a criminal who's escaped on an electric trolley. Noted. It's widely regarded as a Gritty and Worthy Sequel, but Doyle's character is such a boor, such a loud stoopeed American it's hard to care about him.

The film begins with French police slicing up fish because they think they contain drugs; made me think the movie's slogan should have been “This Time It's Poissonal.”

Hmm: Pages didn't know what to do with that one, so it ignored it. How French.

Anyway. Wrote the column. Did a half-hour or so on Newspapers with my friend Bob Davis on my old station KSTP AM 1500: you can hear the entire thing here, if you wish. (Can't find direct link – go to Friday, 10:00 AM hour.)
Ran off to get the quotes I needed for the story, and since one of the stops was an antique store, I managed to get a few things that looked essential. Surprise: matchbooks! Actual surprise: can labels from the 20s.

Here's one:

Don't say they didn't warn you.

You want some more? Here:
Spinach with *Wilted* Lettuce? Slide the bowl down my way, mac.

I'll have more, later today. I also found this giant cardboard poster in the basement, and was transfixed. This is what you should be! Be this! All the smart girls are This! Compare yourself!

---

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 ultra links is HERE!
Context is required, but we have none. I’m guessing it was displayed in a department store or a women's store, surrounded by the chic accoutrements of a modern dress shop . . . or it sat in the window of a medium-sized city in the middle of the country, a mute rebuke for some, an encouragement for the young and light-bodied. Wonder who she was.

Wonder when they stopped issuing recommended ankle diameters.

**Later today:** more labels; the screed; 100 Mysteries, and if my insane and needless need to fulfill all duties holds true, the Comic Ads section. Meanwhile, *Here's the Diner*. (iTunes version will be up later – the new version of iWeb requires an enormous re-uploading of everything.)

*Here's the newspaper column.* (No permalink as I write this – scroll down to see my smiling face.)

Friday Lance Lawson up at buzz.mn around nine.

That'll hold us for a while, no?
53 RESPONSES TO *friday, march 13th*

**jamcool** says:
March 14, 2009 at 2:20 am

Ironically, the PAN AM name and globe lives on...as a railroad!

[http://www.guilfordrail.com/default.htm](http://www.guilfordrail.com/default.htm)

**John** says:
March 14, 2009 at 12:16 pm

The most idiotic thing about renaming the Pan Am Building the Met Life Building — other than putting the building where it was in the first place — is that this [Met Life Building](http://www.guilfordrail.com/default.htm) one mile to the south is a so-much better looking one.

**Kev** says:
March 19, 2009 at 11:36 am

*The means by which they kept it from falling over where unique at the time, a “bundled tubes” idea that's manifested by its outward appearance.*

“Bundled tubes,” you say? So Ted Stevens might think that the Internet is the Sears, I mean Willis, Tower?
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?
What the hell is the matter with Google? I read stuff like this, and I shake my head:

After buying unified messaging company GrandCentral a few years ago, the largest internet search company has morphed that service into “Google Voice.” Google Voice lets you can place free phone calls to anywhere (from anywhere) in the U.S. where you have internet access.

It’s a wonderful thing for us, of course, but would it kill you guys to charge something for something? I know they’ll charge a few cents for international calls, and they might well add on costs as the service grows, but I’m almost less likely to adopt something if I’m not paying for it, perverse as that sounds. I hate free apps that turn into paid apps, and am happy to pay a reasonable price for a good, useful thing. You can’t complain about free.

But it’s not that. It’s almost as if Google has some institutional bias against charging customers for products. I know, I know, they’re many things, they’re an ad company, they exist to do good, and so on. But you can imagine the fate of the poor soul who met with the board when they were ready to roll out a product that could crush the American telephony paradigm:

“So, I believe that a nominal cost, say, a dollar per month, would serve to give
the product a special, premium edge, and set it apart from our other offerings – particularly since Google Movies, which will create the third Star Wars trilogy and beam them in HD to user's computers at no charge, is anticipated to actually deposit money in the end-user's account as our way of saying thanks.”

Board members nod; one says “This ‘paying’ for products. Go into that a little more, if you could.”

“Well, we provide a service, and people pay us for it.”

Silence; muffled coughs. Another board member speaks up:

“Interesting. I have to admit that's a novel take on the whole approach. We were thinking that the service would build awareness of the Google brand.”

At this point the presenter – who anticipated this very objection – passes out aerial photos of a remote Amazonian tribe, which has not only constructed the Google logo out of colored stones, but etched a giant search box in the dirt and is using it to pose questions to the Great Spirit.

“Marketing tells me that brand awareness is at 105%, which includes possible microbes on Mars. If you'll notice sequence D of the tribal photos, you'll see that they sacrifice a man covered in black paint; we believe this is a reference to Ask Jeeves.”

“Jeeves? Well, these people are primitives.”

“That's not the point. We believe – oh, to hell with it. Give it away, I don't care. Good day.”

Spent much of the night doing the old parental duty: helping the child with a project due tomorrow. In olden times no one would believe that a child could come up with an animation all by herself, and indeed she didn't; in the interests of time I did some batch-edits and transition work, but let her do a few so she could say she'd helped. It's taken up all the time I have for private writing tonight, so if there's no novel in a year WE ALL KNOW WHO TO BLAME.

Now for the real 2009 statement: if she's going to take a bath and get to bed on time, I'll have to photoshop out the cobwebs.

It will never get easier. In twenty years parents will be running around shouting WHERE'S YOUR CEREBRAL UPLOAD DONGLE?

I don't know.

Well, when did you last stick on your head?

I don't know. Yesterday?

You had it this morning when we added the schematics of the Eiffel Tower so you could add them to the holo-emitter when you got to school.
Oh. Right. It's in my locker.

No it's not in you locker. I saw you disconnect it before you left the house. I put it back into the server port right – here – on the kitchen table, and now it's gone.

(child, watching UsTube video on the inside of her eyelids, doesn't answer.)

THINK. Where did it go?

I don't KNOW!

It's not my problem if it's gone. I didn't delink it from the server – wait a minute, did you delink it?

Maybe.

OPEN YOUR EYES when you're talking to me. Why did you delink it? You didn't do something with it, did you? That's a custom upload dongle.

So?

So other kids have to use Tar-Mart nine gigahertz upload dongle, that's why, and they pick up other people's signals and then go to school and tell the plots of shows they shouldn't watch and they think it's their book report. You have a custom dongle with a rotating frequency so you don't get nosebleeds. What's so funny?

Dongle.

Listen missy – augh, I give up. Roomba! Find! Item . . . oh, crap, what's the item number? Where's the iHouse remote?

I don't know, it's not mine.

Are you sitting on it?

I don't know.

Well, get up – see, there it is? Ah jaysus spices, it's low on battery, of course. I just charged it last month. Well, maybe there's enough juice . . . Okay, Roomba app . . . NO I DO NOT WANT TO UPGRADE. Because THE BUS IS COMING. There. Find item number 325.

Two minutes later the Roomba is banging against the back door.

Did you take it outside?

Yes. I remember now, I took it up in the treehouse.

WHY?

I was playing.

AUGH.
(Parent runs outside, fetches cerebral upload dongle. Returns.)

There. Now sit still. I’m beaming the outline.

*Can’t you beam the whole book review?*

No, you have to deliver it like you mean it. In my day I was only able to supplement a book review with a multimedia presentation, and if the disk was scratched, I was out of luck.

*Yeah, and you had to walk to the bus instead of hoverboarding. I know.*

In the end I not only burned it on a disk, I uploaded it to the cloud and sharpened the URL on the CD. I’m surprised I didn’t genetically engineer some nanomites to arrange themselves in the shape of the pictures in case those options fail.

*Ordinary day*, but a good start to the week – HOT. Absolute real hot, 65 degrees. The boulevard glacier is almost dead – photos to come at buzz.mn. Work was slick – we’re now doing two anchors for two different segments, for reasons that will become apparent later. I had the second shift, weather-sports-bright, and it was full of chunky sports stuff like “Class 1 Gopher Women’s NCAA Basketball Tournament,” which are words I would never string together in real life. But slap it up on the teleprompter, and out it goes. I feel much more comfy now than the first time, which means it will become ordinary enough to escape the Scrutinizing of the Failure Encouragement Brigade. The moving hand writes, having flipped the middle finger, moves on.


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**26 RESPONSES TO tuesday, march 17**

**Joe Costa** says:
March 17, 2009 at 3:32 am

Here’s a St. Patrick’s Day question for ya Jim boy. Whatever happened to Bruce Mars, the guy who played Finnigan in that Star Trek episode?

**John Everett** says:
March 17, 2009 at 4:22 am

The Google Adwords is so lucrative that they don’t need to charge for anything else. It’s just another place to put google adwords. Advertiser supported and all that rot.
hpoulter says:
March 17, 2009 at 5:32 am

.. Whatever happened to Bruce Mars, the guy who played Finnigan in that Star Trek episode?

From a quick Google, I'd say he vanished with barely a trace. Maybe he lives full time autographing TOS trading cards and going to Cons, like Guy (Crewman Number Six) on Galaxy Quest. I hope not.

hpoulter says:
March 17, 2009 at 5:38 am

.. By the way, just say no to green beer. Make your beer black, or at least black and tan. For real excess that will make you dance on the bar and kiss a waitress, try black velvet – Guiness and Champagne. My only really “lost” St Paddy's day (many moons ago) started out with those at Clyde's in D.C. Where it ended up I don't know, but I have a faint memory of how I felt the next day.

Bryan says:
March 17, 2009 at 7:28 am

Google is pure evil. Oh, sure, everyone thinks Microsoft is evil (and Asus is on my personal fecal roster this week) but it's really Google that will conquer the world and make us live in some kind of Syndicate Wars-esque dystopia.

WalterPeck says:
March 17, 2009 at 7:44 am

Google would sooner make gmail not beta than charge someone for something.

MRNUTTY says:
March 17, 2009 at 7:55 am

it's comforting to know they will still have tree houses in 2039!

Gibbering Madness says:
March 17, 2009 at 8:05 am

Some incidental advice:

The “Black and Tans”, the nickname for the Royal Irish Constabulary Reserve Force, were a paramilitary force in Ireland in 1920-1921 which fought against the IRA. The Irish accuse it of murdering civilians and priests, and burning down much of Cork in December 1920. Its tactics eventually horrified the government in London.

The drink called in America a “black and tan” isn't named after the paramilitary force, but it is strongly advised never to order something called a “black and tan” if you are in a bar in Ireland.

wiredog says:
March 17, 2009 at 8:41 am

Jim, you're not the customer. You are the product being sold to the
customer...

**rbd** says:
March 17, 2009 at 8:47 am

Oh man, those Tar-Mart nine gigahertz upload dongles, I feel real sorry for kids who still have to use them. The iGoogleplex 27 gigahertz ones are the way to go. Brilliant design by SteveJobs 2.0.5.

**mcsage** says:
March 17, 2009 at 9:09 am

Incidental Advice is good.

Also holds true in Irish clubs / pubs here in the States, as well. If you want a 1/2 Guinness and 1/2 Harp, (tasty, btw) the recommended call is for a half and half. Some folks who lost relatives to the 'Black and Tans' are QUITE sensitive about it, and might encourage you to drink elsewhere.

Just sayin’...

**juanito - John Davey** says:
March 17, 2009 at 9:25 am

Hey the Upload Dongle could be a two way street for the times when I ask my girls: “What were you thinking”?

As depicted in James’ tale, the parents still do all the work, as in the days of old...

My 7yr old has spring picture day at school – on St. Patrick’s Day. Every flippin’ kid will be wearing green. What were they thinking when they scheduled that?

**RebeccaH** says:
March 17, 2009 at 9:25 am

If your scenario comes to pass, James, I suspect parents will be able to harangue their kids by direct brain upload, rather than yelling.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
March 17, 2009 at 9:30 am

*RebeccaH Says:*
March 17th, 2009 at 9:25 am

If your scenario comes to pass, James, I suspect parents will be able to harangue their kids by direct brain upload, rather than yelling.

Were that it were so!

**Tom** says:
March 17, 2009 at 9:33 am

I’m still stuck on the whole Google Voice thing. I can just imagine having a conversation with a friend using this service, when all of a sudden a word or two get underlined and an ad voice pops up and steers you and your friend off into discussing the best deals on garden supplies.
HunkyBob says:
March 17, 2009 at 10:25 am

+1 to hpoulter on the color of beer. Green beer, forsooth. Sounds like a hang over from the bad old day of prohibition. (pun intended)

There's a great English style pub south of Houston where the barkeep, who's from England, can make a three layer beer. Calls it a triple decker. I forget the actual beers he uses but of course Guinness is one.

Tim Windsor says:
March 17, 2009 at 10:31 am

I'm just happy that my GrandCentral number — which is the only number I've given out for the past two years — is safe now that it's Google Voice. I'd pay, but happy to get it for free.

Jeff says:
March 17, 2009 at 10:42 am

Google Voice… sounds like that service I've known for a year or so as Skype.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 17, 2009 at 10:52 am

There was a SciFi series from the BBC in the 70s called Blake's 7 that was the Firefly of its time. There was a computer called Orak(sp), that if I recall the premise, could read any other computer in the local universe because they were all using the same operating system and were more or less all networked together.

There was only one Orak built by the software company's eccentric president. At the time I watched the series, I wondered if it would be a Bill Gates or a Steve Jobs. Now I wonder if it would be a Larry Page/Sergey Brin/Eric Schmidt.

I also recall Orak was not all that useful because you had to ask questions of it in very precise ways to get an answer. E.g. if you asked “is that battle cruiser tracking us”, Orak may say no, because it is not tracking the people but, is tracking the space ship they are in.

Mr_Lilacs says:
March 17, 2009 at 11:11 am

Google really practice “Don't be Evil” as best as they can, it's just that they have good and evil completely backwards.

Zoc says:
March 17, 2009 at 12:20 pm

> would it kill you guys to charge something for something?

First the hook must be baited. I still have a bookmark from when Google was first announced (I gave it a try and decided it wasn't as good as AltaVista, but ‘marked it just in case it improved). Now it's everywhere, and still free… for the time being.

But one day, once their hooks are in deep enough, they'll start
charging for everything – and we'll all pay, and they'll take over THE WORLD!

Yeah, I'm kidding... OR AM I?!

**HockeyMom** says:
March 17, 2009 at 12:29 pm

**RebeccaH** Says:
March 17th, 2009 at 9:25 am

If your scenario comes to pass, James, I suspect parents will be able to harangue their kids by direct brain upload, rather than yelling.

How wonderful! We parents will be able to send them little virtual "howlers" like J.K. Rowling described in the Harry Potter series – Timed, of course, to go off in the most embarrassing of locations when the largest peer group is present.

Oh, and I had the same experience with a Black Velvet in a darts bar at Dupont Circle in DC – Really smooth going down; Just don't stand up too fast…

**Warren** says:
March 17, 2009 at 1:58 pm

Wow. The Google rant and the Future Kid story were both quite good. That parent-at-wit's-end thing could make a nice comedy sketch.

**Richmond** says:
March 17, 2009 at 3:49 pm

Hahahahahaha! The upload dongle had me laughing until I cried – thanks for that! 😜

**Teresa** says:
March 17, 2009 at 7:16 pm

Upload dongle... OMG – I'm wiping tears. Excellent.

All those times I was trying to get my son's attention – back in the day... I later learned that Drill Sgts seem to figure out this dilemma easily – I now realize I should've been a DS and life with children would've been much easier. No dongles allowed.

**EG** says:
March 18, 2009 at 7:51 am

If it makes you feel better, although I'm not sure why it would, 800-GOOG-411 hangs up on me every time I call. “Whole Foods, Richmond. I'll connect you.” Then nothing.
Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!

3: Black & White World
4: Sears 1934
5: Comic ads
6: 100 Mysteries
Institute of Official Cheer
Lint: the Institute Tumblr
PopCrush
Screedblog
Shorpy.com
StarTribune Column

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.

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18: THE TRAFFIC STOP

Got pulled over today for speeding. Natalie had a dentist's appointment, so I yanked her out of school early, waited downstairs while she packed up and wandered down, then bade her to hurry because we were late.

TOASTER she said a block away from school. This means she's seen an Element. It's our version of Slug Bug. Which also includes Slug Bugs. Ten points for an Element, five points for a VW Bug, 35 points for a Toaster identical in hue to mine.

TOASTER! TOASTER! she saw two more at an intersection, and suddenly I was down 30 points.

You will not win this round, I said. So I drove on, looking left and right, studying the side streets for Elements and Bugs. I said I would use my super-forward vision to see them in the distance, and she said that was NO FAIR because I was in the front seat and could see farther. After 20 blocks I had a Toaster and a Slug Bug to my credit, but she'd added a Slug Bug, which put her up 20 points. I sped on.

Literally: on the broad, misleadingly parkway-like road between the freeway and the mall, I was flagged down by a cop. For a second it did – not – compute; usually they come after you with lights, but this fellow got out of his car and waved me to the road, well in advance. It took another second to
realize I’d been speeding. Let me put it this way: I was reasonably sure without checking my dials that I had been speeding.

I told Natalie to relax, it was just a speeding ticket, but she got the trembles. Understandable. I get them too; it’s natural. For all I know someone ripped a parking ticket off my windshield, it turned into a warrant, and I’m headed for the lockup, but we’ll cross that bridge, having put the car in gear and fled the scene, when we come to it.

Rolled down the window. Put my hands on the wheel, 10 – and – 2. Turned the flashers on, because I was behind him. Said, more or less, I was speeding. Heading to the dentist’s, a little late for the appointment, but of course that’s no excuse.

And then I shut up, because if I’ve learned anything from COPS, it’s don’t babble. Babbling makes you look nervous, and if you’re nervous there might be a reason. Aside from the one related to a guy standing outside your door with a gun and the right to detail you, that is. He nodded and asked for my license and proof of insurance. Good thing they don’t ask for registration around here, because I have no idea what I’d be expected to produce. Uh – it’s at home. In an envelope. Is it the thing that has an embossed seal? I have the security code for the radio, if that helps.

He thanked me and went back to the squad car, which is the everyday equivalent of waiting for the jury to come back. As time passed I was convinced he was drilling deep into my permanent record, and the words of a displeased second-grade teacher would gusher out like oil. Natalie had two tears, and I did my best to put a happy face on it: the policeman is helping Daddy learn to slow down. We’re all friends. Do I look nervous?

After a while he returned with a ticket for “unreasonable acceleration.”

“It’s sort of a strange charge,” he said. He seemed very apologetic about it. “It’s below a speeding ticket, so it won’t go on your record.” I nodded, thinking it was a cross between a warning and a criminey mac were you moving, but you manned up about it slap on the wrist. I almost said “well, I’ve had it coming for years, and you know what they say about justice delayed,” but I bade him good day.

I examined the ticket to see if the fine was listed. It was not. Had he forgot to add the fine? Was there a fine?

I got out of the car.

Now, you’re saying: IDIOT. NEVER GET OUT OF THE CAR. I know. Like I say, I’ve watched every COPS episode ever put to tape. But this was not exactly a shots-fired call, you know? I’m a middle-aged guy driving a clean, well-maintained vehicle with an uncluttered interior, I produced my paperwork without apologizing for the glassine envelope that fell out of the wallet, I admitted my crime, and betrayed not a whit of antagonism. I should have honked? He would have liked that better? Still, probably stupid, but: I got out and stood by my car, not moving. Not advancing. Hands visible. I knew he
would see me in his rear-view mirror; he did. He got out.

“There's no fine listed,” I said. “It's not on the schedule on the other side.”

“You'll have to call them,” he said. “They'll tell you what the fine is.”

He didn't know? Ah, well. I got back in, drove off.

After the dentist's appointment (Hey Dad, No Cavities!) we returned to the car, and I looked at the ticket again. It was nice that the officer's name was printed so prominently.

Hold on: the officer's name was printed on the line reserved for the person who got the ticket. I looked to the line above – there was a DL number, totally different from mine. The description of the driver was amusing – 6 feet 1, 245 pounds.

I am many things, but I am not six feet one, and when seated I do not even give the impression of six feet minus one.

The address and the license number were correct.

So he'd punched in my DL number, got a screen, then highlighted the wrong guy for the printout.

_Ah! Loophole! Don't have to pay!_ Sorry, don't see it that way. First of all, I was speeding; I confessed. Second, if I don't pay, then the other guy gets the warrant, and suffers the nightmare of having the police come back after running his numbers and telling him he as a warrant. Third, while it would an instructive enterprise to convince a judge to toss the ticket, I'd feel wrong about it.

Called the number on the ticket to see what to do. They said, not surprisingly, that I could either pay or tell it to the judge. Not in exact words, but that was the idea. I almost wished they had said “tell it to the judge,” just as I wish I'd said “it's a fair cop” to the policeman. Life can be like a movie, if everyone would play along.

Punchline: the fine for “unreasonable acceleration” is the same as an actual speeding ticket. It's a mercy ticket.

Without the mercy part.

_—_

Epilogue: On the way back from the dentist's I saw enough Toasters and Slug Bugs to tie Natalie's score; we were both at 65, which is unusually high. So I took a detour, declared SUDDEN DEATH, and drove through a grocery store parking lot.

TOASTER she yelled, and sure enough: another Element. Going fast. I wondered if the driver was the guy named on my ticket, and if that was the case, I wanted to say SLOW DOWN. Or at least if you get a ticket in my name:
Pay it.

NewsBreak duty again today, so Miscreant Roundup at buzz will be up late. On this site still to come: Out of Context Ad Challenge at 11 or so, and a Mpls update around 1. See you in the comments!

Also, a screed was posted in the dark of the night, here. If you're up for that sort of thing. If not, by all means, forget I said anything.

49 RESPONSES TO wednesday, march 18: the traffic stop

Al Federber says:
March 18, 2009 at 12:31 am

Never talk to cops.

juanito - John Davey says:
March 18, 2009 at 12:54 am

Never call them Cops – it sounds like a slur to me. My best friend’s Dad was a Sacramento City Police Detective, and another of my High School football teammates ended up a Sac City Patrolman. Officer sounds fine to me.

My former Neighbor, Sac County Deputy Sheriff Jeff Mitchell was murdered in the line of duty in 2006. I can see his old front door from the window right now. Left behind a charming young wife, and a six year old son. Went to the memorial service at Raley’s Field with thousands of others. Biggest traffic jam in my life, more than after a Niner’s game in San Francisco. My little girls will play Little League at Deputy Jeff Mitchell Field here in our town of El Dorado Hills http://www.jeffmitchellfield.com/

It is a thankless job.

6 foot 1, 245ilbs? That’s me, if you add another inch and a half. Sorry, I’ll be a stand up guy and take the rap.

Toaster Owner says:
March 18, 2009 at 1:23 am

Blue Honda Element drivers aren’t nearly as freindly out here in PA as they seem in your neck of the woods (as evinced by your previous posts in the past, there seems to be some sort of underground midwestern Element community.)

I drive a 2000 Honda Insight, and still get waves/honks/nods from other Insight drivers long after the novelty of hybrid cars should have worn off. Even my “McCain” sticker did not seem to dissuade “Obama” sticker Insight drivers from freindly overtures. It was nice to see car geekines transcend political rivalry.
So, when my husband got his Element I would wave/nod to fellow blue Element drivers. Nothing. Nada. Zip. Not even a headlight flash. Oh well. Fair enough. Normally I'm not very friendly either I guess, and I certainly understand wanting to keep to yourself.

Which brings me to the reason for this comment: Now instead of playing the rather depressing game of “let's wave at the fellow Element driver and see if they snub us” we have a new game to play. We send you our thanks.

TOASTER!

Jay says:
March 18, 2009 at 2:19 am

I don't mean to interfere with the whole vibe of good cheer about getting a ticket, but how on earth can a cop claim to know you're speeding by standing in front of your car?
Also: “there was a DL number, totally different from mine.”
“The address and the license number were correct.”
What?

Rob says:
March 18, 2009 at 3:21 am

Thanks for the Screed link, starting the morning with a laugh is the best way to start.

Terry says:
March 18, 2009 at 4:27 am

If a cop pulls you over, no matter what he says, just keep saying back to him “Well, that's your opinion”. Thar'll work.

Mxymaster says:
March 18, 2009 at 4:48 am

Getting pulled over on St. Patrick's Day and not stinking of booze ought to earn you a free pass.

Mark says:
March 18, 2009 at 5:58 am

Oh, the things we've all learned from COPS!

Henry says:
March 18, 2009 at 6:41 am

Your slugbug/toast contest pales in comparison to a trip of ours when the kids were young. Our contest involved a stick of gum for every car carrier they saw, and we took back a piece for every VW Van that we saw. We were just about even, until we drove by a Chrysler plant near St. Louis, without about 500 car carriers parked. Now in their 30s and 40s, the kids remind us continuously that we never paid up on that debt. We say we did, by saving their teeth and jaw muscles from overchewing gum.
Bryan says:
March 18, 2009 at 6:58 am

You're not required to have your car registered in MN? How strange. In VT, you need license, registration, proof of insurance and a paid-up membership to the “Anthony Pollina for God-King” club. In Objectivist NH all you need is a license and registration. Insurance is optional, because that's just a way for the government to oppress you, man. But I've never hear of a state where you needed license and proof of insurance, but no registration.

Patrick says:
March 18, 2009 at 7:11 am

IIRC, here in Georgia you just need your license and proof of insurance. I think the registration is optional. Some cops may ask for it, some may not.

I had gotten pulled over for many things. The stupidest one was for having a burned out headlight. The way I was caught was that as I was going down the road, I decided to turn on my brights so that I could see better (country road + country dark = can't see a damn thing). The problem was there was a cop up ahead, facing towards me, trying to catch speeders, so of course I almost burned out his retinas. He wrote up a ticket, while another cop was checking the passenger side. I think the reason why was because I had reached over in my glove compartment for my wallet, since I had to drive a godawful (still do) distance between home and work.

The fine was about $125. I got the bulb for the headlight replaced that evening at Wal-Mart on the way home from work. The bulb, plus labor cost about $10. If it was me writing the ticket, I would have made it just a “fix-it warning” and let them be on their way. I guess my record preceded me. I'd been pulled over once for passing a stopped school bus (yes, the sign was out, and lights were flashing), and once for having an expired tag. I had actually been pulled over twice for the expired tag, but not within the same year.

HarrisonS says:
March 18, 2009 at 7:13 am

Yeah...and i got ticketed in Tennessee on the way to Memphis on New Year's Eve for no proof of insurance, it was not in my car. I beat myself up for forgetting that in the Great State of NC an extra insurance proof is on the registration. Not that would have mattered to the automaton of a state trooper that ticketed me.

oh well.

John MM says:
March 18, 2009 at 7:34 am

I'm not an expert but I think that ticket will be thrown out if you contest it because the identifying information is incorrect. If you pay the fine and there is a hit to your insurance it's worth fighting.

Another reason to contest the ticket is to keep a clean record. If you accept the ticket, the next time you're pulled over the officer will see the old ticket. He's more likely to give you a ticket since you have a “history” of bad driving.

Here in Massachusetts tickets aren't contested in front of a judge but instead go before a Clerk Magistrate who hears from the Officer (or
his representative) and the driver. I’ve been before a Magistrate twice in 15 years and had the ticket dismissed both times. Once because I was genuinely contrite and had a clean record. They gave me a break and dismissed the ticket. For the second ticket no one from the police force showed up, which resulted in an automatic dismissal. I saved several thousands in insurance surcharges for a few hours of time.

Andy says:
March 18, 2009 at 7:39 am

Did anyone else read it as – the ticket listed him as 6 feet tall and weighing 1,245 pounds?

AWK says:
March 18, 2009 at 7:55 am

Hate to be a killjoy but if you pay more attention to your driving and less attention to entertaining the kid in the car you’ll have less interaction with law enforcement.

HunkyBob says:
March 18, 2009 at 8:07 am

So I’m running an errand last evening night and Hugh Hewitt is on the radio, going on about something and through the chatter I hear “Lileks got a speeding ticket, can we get him on the air?”. The next thing I hear is James’ voice describing the situation. “Oh,” says I. “This will be interesting”. Come to find out Hewitt found out about it because that our genial host was twittering the whole thing. What an amazing world it is where an embarrassing situation can be brought to nationwide prominence via a cell phone and connections to a talk show host.

In Texas, for speeding tickets and other such offenses, we’re allowed to take driver’s education to clear the ticket from the record. Of course, if you get hit with another moving violation within a certain time after taking the course you’re TOAST, so to speak.

Our registration is shown on the decal we place on our windshields, so we don’t need to provide the paperwork registration here. Just license and proof of insurance. I had better remember to have that paper on hand the next time I travel out of state in case I’m pulled over.

I expect the officer that pulled James over was using Radar or Lidar, or some other kind of electronic speed detection – I assume they use that up there in MN.

I was called for Jury duty once and assigned to a county precinct court. I wasn’t selected, but since I was there, I stayed to watch the proceedings, having never been in a court so small and was interested to see how the J.P handled things.

Someone had been pulled over on the local speed trap portion of the highway here and I think the offender had hoped the officer wouldn’t show up and that the ticket would be dismissed, because her defense was pathetic. Prosecution asked the officer about his qualifications to operate the radar, and outlined what he had seen and rested. The defense, if you can call it that, made a bumbling remark or two of no coherence, and was asked by the judge if she rested. she did. Then she said, “Can I say something else?”
“No.” said the judge, “You had your chance.”

Since there wasn’t a separate deliberating room for the jury, everyone else was directed to leave the court room. I left, and returned to work, figuring that the offender would be found guilty, and ordered to pay the fine. I half hoped the judge would fine her for wasting the court’s and all the jury pool’s time, but I guess it was her right to ask for a trial, no matter how stupid she was to do so.

mcsage says:
March 18, 2009 at 8:08 am

Loved the Screed – what a total dufus! Thanx for sharing!
I know it’s small compared to border invasions, free ‘health care’ for Illegals (but soldiers have to pay thier own) and gigundass spending, but how about a protest to strip the NEA **AND** PBS?
Wah't ever happened to the romance of the Starving Artist, anyway?

Moishe3rd says:
March 18, 2009 at 8:25 am

Ahhh… Thanks to HunkyBob for explaining the Hewitt reference. I didn’t stay tuned long enough to hear James’ explanation and it befuddled me as to how Hugh Hewitt would know that our congenial host had gotten a ticket. Was James calling him up to tell him so?
No.
It is obvious that I have not yet entered the world of Twitter.
And, in spite of Mr. Lileks rationales for doing so, I probably never will. I seen no reason to pay more massive dollars to my cellphone company than I am already doing, just to be online…
(Irrelevant aside – my automatic spell checker is fine with “cellphone” but has a problem with “online.”)

Benjammin says:
March 18, 2009 at 8:33 am

Registration IS required in Minnesota, but they don’t ask for the proof, because it’s right on the license plate. If you have your tabs up to date, your car is registered. The piece of paper that you get when you get your new tabs is the registration card. I found that out the hard way after getting pulled over out-of-state a few times. So to all Minnesotans reading – after you put your tabs on, don’t throw that piece of paper away! Put it in the glove box, just in case you get pulled over out of state.

Also, I had a ticket thrown out because they wrote it under the wrong ordinance number (the description of the ticket did not match the description that went with the particular ordinance). So, I’m pretty sure you can get that ticket negated by simply pointing out that it was written incorrectly. Shouldn’t even need to take it to court, that’s something they should be able to handle in the pre-court thingy (I forget what that area is called).

rbj says:
March 18, 2009 at 8:54 am

I’ve learned not to talk to cops from Lance. Also, don’t razz anyone about Doris.
Tom says:
March 18, 2009 at 9:01 am

I'm still wondering how you managed to tweet the whole event as it unraveled with such clarity and verbosity.

Rich says:
March 18, 2009 at 9:26 am

In Australia, our children don't weep in fear when their parents are pulled over by police.

RebeccaH says:
March 18, 2009 at 9:29 am

Righteous screedy fisking, James.

When my father quit the oil fields, he became a small-town policeman. It is, as Juanito says, a thankless job, and it's also hard on the kids.

jeischen says:
March 18, 2009 at 9:44 am

I was speeding once when I popped over a hill on a long, straight stretch of highway to find a highway patrolman at the bottom of the hill writing a ticket to a driver he had pulled over. In fact, there were about three cars pulled over and the trooper's partner was standing behind the last vehicle and waved me over, too. When one of the troopers came up to my window, he told me they had a plane in the air that was clocking the traffic as it came down that stretch of highway. Doh!

I'm an insurance agent and when filling out an auto insurance application, I always ask about previous violations. I often get the reply that they got a speeding ticket recently but the cop said it wouldn't go on their record. I have to explain to them that the cop meant that there would be no points against their drivers license for suspension purposes, but that insurance companies will ding you for every moving violation you accrue in the past three years.

Matt Maynard says:
March 18, 2009 at 9:59 am

“After a while he returned with a ticket for “unreasonable acceleration.”"

They'll ticket anything these days.

Gene Dillenburg says:
March 18, 2009 at 10:11 am

When do you think James will turn on the comments to his 11/7 screed, so we can tell him he's got the wrong map? That's not the famous Red State / Blue State divide, but rather it shows county-by-county trends. Look at Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota. Those states show up as entirely blue, even though they went for McCain. They are blue here because they gave more votes to Obama in 2008 than they did to Kerry in 2004.
swschrad says:
March 18, 2009 at 10:16 am

the bad news is that you, James, get a flogging.
the good news is, it's with a wet noodle.
pay up and make the T-shirt, you lawbreakin' thug.
(one more year and I'm past the ticket watching part. uh-uh, we bad, we bad.)

Alec says:
March 18, 2009 at 10:19 am

The card that comes attached to your new license plate tabs in MN is your registration. You're supposed to keep that in you car and produce it when asked. I had to learn this. As a standup comic, I had a joke about saying, “What the hell is registration?” and then fleeing th scene.

I enjoy your description of playing the game with your daughter with reckless abandon.

I'm with John, contest the ticket. I'll bet it will be dismissed because the officer messed it up. Let's put one in the win column for our side. Could be a fun ordeal to blog about too.

When I got a ticket for rolling through a stop sign late one Sunday night a couple months ago I thought of JL. Come on, we all do it, and I think I was exercising prudent driving nonetheless.

Susan says:
March 18, 2009 at 10:29 am

When I was working for the Sheriff's Dept many moons ago, I looked up my husband's (then boyfriend's) driving record only to find he had an outstanding traffic warrant. Only problem: It was out of New Jersey and hubby had never been there. They tagged the wrong guy, using hubby's 1st & last name but different middle name.

This happens more than one would think esp. out of criminal courts that issue arrest warrants for people who have common names. Sheriff's Dept. will haul in a person with same name/birthdate as the missing defendant. It can be hit or miss at times!

Walter says:
March 18, 2009 at 10:32 am

How can the fine for “unreasonable acceleration” be the same as speeding when speeding's fines are based on mph over the speed limit?

DryOwlTacos says:
March 18, 2009 at 10:43 am

What I want to know is how you Twittered the whole thing with your hands on 10 and 2.
Al Federber says:
March 18, 2009 at 10:50 am

If you're stopped by a cop, never give him/her any information apart from your name and address. Do not chat with them (they're fishing for a reason to bust you), instead ask them if you are free to go. If they say you are, leave immediately without saying anything else. Never give permission for a search.

If you are detained, tell the officer that you are going to remain silent, and that you want to see a lawyer. Don't say anything else to them; their goal is to make a case against you.

It is especially important to be on guard now because governments are facing big financial shortfalls, and they're out for all the money they get (like giving tickets for “unreasonable acceleration”). Also, the prison industry is always looking for more inductees.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 18, 2009 at 11:23 am

Last time I drew the attention of an officer, he did not like a lane change I made trying to get around cars that had all stopped to turn left and were encroaching into the lane I was driving in.

He asked how many tickets I had, seemed odd, I was 40 years old and driving a Geo Metro, no a speed demon combination. I was headed into the campus of Stanford University, I think he thought I was a punk college student.

I told him that I have not had a ticket in 20 years (I have had two in my entire life). He was impressed and told me to be careful and let me go.

Patrick says:
March 18, 2009 at 12:05 pm

I have a built-in radar/laser detector. I can tell whether or not there's an officer of highway patrolman running radar along the route I take to and from work. This really helps when either I'm late to work, or want to get home sooner rather than later.

Of course, I know almost all of their favorite hideouts between home and work.

One time I predicted precisely who one officer was going to pull over. I was driving down the highway when I saw the nose of a squad car sticking out of the bushes about half a mile away. I was doing a few over, so I decided to drop down. This white car next to me slams on the brakes, but the officer saw him. Sure enough, he was pulled over a mile on down the road.

I've always believed having to renew your registration yearly before your birthday was stupid. I think the only time you should have to renew your registration is either if you change addresses, change vehicles, or change your name, either due to marriage or other legal reasons.

Sid Vicious says:
March 18, 2009 at 12:09 pm

Quoting DryOwlTacos: “What I want to know is how you Twittered the whole thing with your hands on 10 and 2.”
Why do you think his wife loves him so much?

Jerry Ray says:
March 18, 2009 at 1:29 pm

>>In Australia, our children don't weep in fear when their parents are pulled over by police.<<

[rolls eyes]

Yep, just one step away from a police state here in the U.S…

Dave says:
March 18, 2009 at 1:52 pm

Get a lawyer. There are guys who will do traffic cases for $50 or less; better to pay him and get the whole thing dropped, especially since usually such a screwup on the ticket is enough to get a dismissal, than pay out whatever absurd fine the court will level.

rhj says:
March 18, 2009 at 2:20 pm

Re: the newest screed, here's a letter to the editor from the local paper, Toledo Blade:
Article published March 10, 2009
For many, art is their sole income

In regard to the letter writer who criticized Rep. Marcy Kaptur for getting federal money set aside to support local artists:

For shame? With all due respect, for some local artists, funding is their only income source. Their job is to be an artist, just as yours may be to be a plumber, office worker, or retail salesman. Not everyone has the talent, skill, or resources to do noncreative jobs. Some are gifted only with creative talents, and they need to eat and pay the rent too.

Without the arts, Toledo would be just another gritty factory town. Art brings in culture, inspires minds, documents history, and provides relief from the mundanity of “normal” life. Children who participate in artistic pursuits do better in math and science than those who do not.

Art is involved in almost everything around us, though some people may only associate it with “frivolous activities” such as those of painters and sculptors. Quite the contrary. Graphic designers, textile designers, fashion designers, product designers, engineers, authors, musicians, actors – all of these fall under the loose category of “artist.”

Without art, there would be no photographs, television shows, gift wrapping paper, greeting cards, corporate letterheads or business cards, technology (because all technology begins with a design, which is a form of art), product containers, team sports logos, paint for your walls, upholstery for your couch, sheets, towels, clothing, books, or music to listen to. Have I made my point yet?

You believe that funding for the arts is an absurd move. For shame.

Jeanne Berry
Bowling Green
Got pulled over last week for running (streeeeetching if you ask me) a red light. He wanted DL, proof of insurance, AND registration. Well, guess what I didn’t have. No ticket for the moving violation (he knew it was bogus), but $126 for lack of registration, even though he confirmed in his car that it was registered. While the jury was out, my 3yo son said, “I hate policemen.” Never heard that statement or even that sentiment from him in my life. I was falling all over myself to say (as I have in the past), “No! No! We loooove policemen. They are brave and they help protect us!” Etc. until he came back. (Please don’t say it, son. Please don’t say it, son.) He didn’t, thankfully.

Sid...I’m still cleaning the vodka/coke off my computer screen. Never done a spit take before until I read your response to dryowltacos. Thanks.

Bad boys, bad boys whatcha want
Whatcha gonna do when yer sheriff John Brown
come for you tell me whatcha gonna do.

When you were eight
And you had bad traits
You go to school and you learn the golden rule
So why are you acting like a bloody fool
If you get hot you must get cool

Bad boys, bad boys
Whatcha gonna do whatcha gonna do
when they come for you
Bad boys, bad boys
Whatcha gonna do, whatcha gonna do
when they come for you

You chuck it on this one
You chuck it on this one
You chuck it on mother and
You chuck it on you father
You chuck it on you brother and
You chuck it on you sister
You chuck it on that one and you chuck it on me

Nobody naw give you no break
Police naw give you no break
Soldier naw give you no break
Not even you idren naw give you no break

Why did you have to act so mean don’t you know
You're a human being born of a mother with
The love of a father reflections come and reflections go
I know sometimes you want to let go
I know sometimes you want to let go

shesnailie says:
March 18, 2009 at 3:31 pm

_@_v – just remember if the officer's name is 'tiny' and being tagged
along with by a plain clothes man with spit curls DO NO
VOLUNTEER ANYTHING.

especially if your wife is named doris

JosePluma says:
March 18, 2009 at 5:34 pm

Mr. Lileks:

Kudos for being a stand-up guy, admitting you made a mistake and
accepting the consequences.

Jessie says:
March 18, 2009 at 5:57 pm

“... and if you're nervous there might be a reason. Aside from the
one related to a guy standing outside your door with a gun and the
right to detail you, that is.”

My God, that Patriot Act expanded the powers of the state more
extensively than I thought. Does the cop carry the detailing supplies
and equipment with him, or does he cuff you, stuff you in the back
of the police car, and drive you to the precinct garage?

Todd says:
March 19, 2009 at 1:36 am

I drove a silver minivan for five years and never once was pulled
over. I bought my green Element 10 months ago and the police have
stopped me twice. Both times they were fishing for something to pin
on me, found nothing and released me.

What's up with green Toasters? Do the police think they're stoner
vehicles ala Scooby Doo's Mystery Machine? Zoinks!

Frosty says:
March 19, 2009 at 6:44 am

[In Australia, our children don't weep in fear when their parents are
pulled over by police.]

That's because the Australian kids who are actually driving the car
are too busy trying to find out where the license, registration, and
proof of insurance are from their blotto Aussie parents in the back
seat of the car...

Cheers!

Kev says:
March 19, 2009 at 12:56 pm
A fellow Texan said:

"Our registration is shown on the decal we place on our windshields, so we don't need to provide the paperwork registration here. Just license and proof of insurance. I had better remember to have that paper on hand the next time I travel out of state in case I'm pulled over."

I knew there was a reason I kept that card; now if I could just remember where I put it. (Of course, I'm trying to remember the last time I drove out of state that didn't involve a rental car…)

And BTW, the reason that we now have windshield stickers instead of the tabs on the license plate is that too many people had the license tabs stolen. It's much harder to take a sticker off the inside of a windshield, and they're designed to self-destruct (not a la Mission Impossible or anything) when they're removed.

Chris says:
March 19, 2009 at 3:41 pm

"Unreasonable acceleration" in an Element? Didn't think that was possible!

Sania says:
March 28, 2009 at 11:08 am

Yikes, sometimes I just wish cops would mind their own business. I feel like every time they're around, it's only for a small, inconvenient reason. The times when someone comes flying past speeding, or driving recklessly, for some reason, it seems like they're not around. Good luck with that mercy ticket though! :}

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Still not finding what you're looking for?
Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!
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?
I think I wrote myself out on Tuesday, which is always a mistake. But these things come in waves; when inspiration strikes, you strike back! And then wonder why you hit it and knocked it out, because it's just gurgling now and making these gross wheezing, hacking sounds.

Well, there's not much to report. The highlight of the day might have been the arrival of a 9000-lb. book called “Store Front: the Disappearing Face of New York.”

It's a catalogue of old metal beauty laid low by time, disrepair, filth, and
idiots. And, occasionally, progress: many of the great old stores closed because the owner lost the lease, and the developer announced plans to erect a condo on the spot. It always makes me wonder whether there's a point where everyone in New York will have a bad view, because everyone's view blocks everyone else's. If there's something to be said for a recession – and there's a lot to be said, really – it's the way it stays the busy hand of destruction for a while, and lets us stop chewing everything up.

It's not just a book of photos; almost every storefront gets a brief bio and some quotes from the owner. One after the other, they all say the same thing about the neon: it breaks when it rains and it costs too much to fix. So they all go dark. New York is a movie set for a serial they stopped shooting a long time ago.

Don't mean to insist that Progress should stop so I can visit a nice urban museum when the fancy strikes, but it's a pity when all signs of old middle-class life are replaced by pretentious, overpriced little bars with $27 appetizers, no? The other day I started reading a Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer collection – hardly any of the strip's online, which is a damned shame – and was reminded how poignant the strips seemed when I first read them. They're all about the old New York, the small shops, the delis, the soda fountains, the innumerable businesses in tall brick buildings staffed by tired bent middle-aged men trying to make a living in small obscure trades, the second-floor restaurants with cuisine from unpronounceable countries, the travelogue theaters. It's all off-kilter, weary, rueful, and fanciful; one long story concerns the Cheap Merchandise District, a scion of a blinds manufacturer and the elderly publisher of a Sexual Hygiene magazine (who reads such things? Knipl wonders, finding a copy in a drugstore), and nothing happens, really; the stories walk past each others like the strangers they are, but they're all connected by a sense of place and culture no other city could produce.

As I said, it seemed like a vanished world when I first read the strips. That was almost 20 years ago.

Anyway. It's a grand, sad book, and proves on every page that neon is the most entrancing and civilized form of signage ever invented – and that the 30s and 40s style was adult and sophisticated in a way nothing has touched since. But for an adult culture, I suppose you need lots of – what's the word? – adults.

I've been shooting some storefronts and signs the last few weeks; hate to say
it, but I added a “recession” tag in the iPhoto for all the empty places. Here's a fine sign that cannot be long for the world, but hangs on year after year. Hummmmm:

And there's this:
Thus concludes today's useless, morose bellyflop into the nostalgic recollection of nice-looking metal! Sorry. I'm hardly in a depressed mood – just tired of current events, and busy with some other duties. Later today: Curious Lucre. In the meantime, it's Lance Lawson Thursday over at buzz.mn. Enjoy!

Oh – since I forgot to post the full version of the Out of Context Ad Challenge, here it is.
People worried about three things in those days: their Scalp, their Feet, and their Digestion. Also, Hitler, but Hitler didn’t make them waddle down to the corner drug store for a Broom or a Herbert water.
Zoc says:
March 19, 2009 at 2:00 am

Sure, start telling all those around you, “There are famous hands in my shoes!” and see where that gets you...

Mxymaster says:
March 19, 2009 at 5:09 am

Told you it was shoes. Next week: Flow, the laxative you smoke!

Amanda Albright Flynn says:
March 19, 2009 at 7:43 am

Women could get a pair of shoes that feel like your feet are in a pair of what look like boxer's hands. Okay, maybe that's got some appeal, but this was from around the time the high heel was born and he doesn't even show the shoe.

Gibbering Madness says:
March 19, 2009 at 7:56 am

But for an adult culture, I suppose you need lots of – what's the word? – adults.

The epitaph of our civilization.

HunkyBob says:
March 19, 2009 at 7:59 am

OK, I'll bite...

What's a 'Herbert water'? I googled it, but nothing came up that seems to fit this context.

Mxymaster says:
March 19, 2009 at 8:18 am

Herbert water was a concoction from Julius Knipl.

Moishe3rd says:
March 19, 2009 at 8:30 am

HARDware store? Lyndale and... oh 25th or so? I believe they are still in business, no? It used to be a third generation mom and pop store, but I believe the founders finally passed on and the grandchildren, one of whom worked there when she went to school with my daughter, are not doing HARDware anymore.

If that's the store that I am thinking of...

Small place with old wood “hardware store” floors.

I once saw a young lady in there, a customer, dressed in a sort of tight black leather outfit thing, with multiple piercings and some sort of black tattoo on her face... All I could think of when I saw her is “I wonder if she is going to have grandchildren and will they care?”

DaveInAz says:
March 19, 2009 at 8:30 am

Hum's! I used to live 2 blocks from there in the old stupid days. I'd
forgotten that the sign was that worn.

**hpoulter** says:
March 19, 2009 at 8:30 am

“Plan to take ample time for Mr. Voyer to study your foot problems” — Oh yes! he will study your nasty feet – feel them and squeeze them and hold them up to the light – for as long as it takes. Mr Voyer has a “thing” for feet.

Formerly Dr Locke Education Director, now webmaster of “Transnational Amusements Presents: Peggy's Magic Sex Feet”

**juanito - John Davey** says:
March 19, 2009 at 8:50 am

Tweeted James last week about the ubiquitous Tower Records Neon sign coming down from the original Tower about 4 blocks away from my day time office in Sacramento.

Here's how it was covered on the local ABC affiliate [http://tinyurl.com/copwj2](http://tinyurl.com/copwj2)

And how the Sacramento Bee covered it: [http://tinyurl.com/cfgsbx](http://tinyurl.com/cfgsbx)

Signs, signs, everywhere signs. Blockin’ out the scenery, breaking my mind.

**Dave (in MA)** says:
March 19, 2009 at 9:08 am

“Herbert water”… does this have anything to do with ST:TOS “The Way to Eden”?

**FreeState** says:
March 19, 2009 at 9:31 am

When I was a kid in the New York area, there was a series of radio ads for Adler Shoes. The background sound was always of a pair of hard-soled shoes walking slowly accross a hard floor. The tag line was always “Old Man Adler stands behind every pair of Adler Shoes.”

I found those ads really disturbing as a kid.

**margaret** says:
March 19, 2009 at 9:31 am

Don't forget the two other things people worried about: halitosis and B.O.

**Mikey NTH** says:
March 19, 2009 at 9:53 am

If the neon tubes break when it rains, then encase the tubes to protect them.

Okay, that's enough from me.
One after the other, they all say the same thing about the neon: it breaks when it rains and it costs too much to fix. So they all go dark.

I watched a Skillern's Drugs neon sign go to pieces once in a hail/rainstorm once in Dallas in the very late 70's. The thing actually flashed “kill”, “kill”, “kill” for a few seconds.

I went to college at the U of M with Betty Hum. She (briefly) married a fraternity brother of mine. I’m happy to say it got us some beer specials!

Julius Knipl...hmm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Knipl,_Real_Estate_Photographer

No wonder I never heard of it. I don’t think it appears in the Houston Press.

Somewhat in the vein of this thread, there's a cool tribute to the heroic aspirations of 1950s municipal parking garages here:

http://forgottenchicago.com/features/chicago-architecture/municipal-parking-garages/

No, I’m not being ironic.

There’s a great neon sign that hangs, unlit for decades but otherwise pristine, on a building at Chicago's Six Corners (Irving/Milwaukee), advertising office jobs for “Girls.” I hope the company that put it there isn’t around any more, because if they ever get socked with a fine for every day that the sign has been in violation....

Mr Voyer has a “thing” for feet.

That’s funny, because I mistakenly read his name in the ad as “Voyeur” at first.

Mr. G. O. Voyer, former Educational Director selling woman's shoes. I feel this is really creepy.

Another thing about this ad. It says for “WOMEN Exclusively at Donaldson's” but sells the men's shoes on the Street Floor. WTF??
Wramblin' Wreck says:
March 19, 2009 at 2:51 pm

A very interesting place to see interesting building architecture and neon signs, especially neon signs is Seoul Korea. Get away from the main tourist places and into some of the neighborhoods that have the 3-4 story tall buildings and the real narrow roads and you can easily spend days and weeks just looking at the building and signs. They have made the signage into an art like Tokyo has done for their restaurant food displays.

Each neighborhood seems to have their own predominate colors; blue and yellow, red and blue, red and yellow. It is all fascinating! Plus it is an entirely different culture that make it even more interesting. Plus the Koreans are such nice people once you get away from the tourist places.

Garry says:
March 19, 2009 at 3:14 pm

Did anybody trouble to measure how many column inches followed the assertion, “Well, there's not much to report.”? Hmm?

Dora Standpipe says:
March 19, 2009 at 4:08 pm

Every Friday AM my DH checks the overnight news to see if Hum's burned down. (He's in beer delivery.) I am sure he will scream in holy terror to see the sign on this site.

RebeccaH says:
March 19, 2009 at 8:36 pm

I understand about the temporary exhaustion of inspiration. The difference between you and people like me, however, is that you never seem to run out, even when you're telling yourself you did.

HarrisonS says:
March 20, 2009 at 8:28 am

You'd be surprised how long these old signs hang around. This one near my college campus is one I loved when I was in school.
http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/encore/ngcre000/00000001/00000812/00000812_ac_0001.jpg

James & Karla Murray says:
April 1, 2009 at 12:13 pm

Thanks so much for the wonderful praise of our Store Front book. We are glad you enjoyed the photos and all the store owner's stories. We also love the flicks you took!

McDiddy says:
April 1, 2009 at 10:40 pm

Ohh… yes. How well I remember Hum's Liquor. It was the best place on the south side that took our fake ID's and bought kegs of Special Export for lunch time BBQ and skipping the afternoon classes at West High School!! And also many a day was spent as a teenager hanging out there in
front of Rex Hardware on Lyndale. Usually admiring the latest purchase, which was typically something cool from OarFolk...
Spent Thursday night in a variety of unproductive and completely enjoyable pursuits. Did the Hewitt show at 7:40. Behind the scenes fun: Natalie was supposed to come home from Girl Scouts right about the time I was due to go on the air, which meant DING DONG, and dog barking, and all manner of horrible calamities. So I’m standing by the door, listening to the hold music with the countdown (“the Hugh Hewitt show – returns! In 30 seconds”) hoping she makes it in before I have to Address the Nation. She did. Whew.

Upstairs; orate and pace. Afterwards I sat down to write the 100 Mysteries, and thought, oh to hell with it.

Really. These aren’t true deadlines. But I let myself slide, then they don’t happen, and the project evaporates, and the odd satisfaction I’ll feel at the end of 2010 when the project is done will be spoiled by my habitual laziness. Then again, to hell with it. What I really want to do is get some Uniblab sounds for this piece I started last week. It’s cheerful and robotic, and it would profit from Uniblab saying “Back to work, back to work.”

You know Uniblab, right? The big-headed robot who elbowed George Jetson out of a job for an episode. Since I couldn’t find the video on YouTube, I bought it from Amazon, isolated the soundtrack, and carved up the dialogue to put into the piece -

At which point I remembered we hadn’t practiced piano. So I tore her away from her drawing tablet and made her practice. Like me as a kid, she hates it.
Loves music, hates to practice. Afterwards she went back to her computer, and finished a story using the week's spelling words. And here it is:

**Spelling Test Words Story**

*Natalie Lileks*

*I was basking on my beach chair, watching the sun set on the horizon. Boats buffeted the quay. Hardly any people went out to surf because the swell was dying down. A bird swooped down and molted a feather which happened to land on my knee. Then I slowly fell asleep.*

*When I woke up, Nothing felt real. It was pitch black. “Must have dozed off again,” I thought. I saw something bubble in the lake, and then it came up. A squid! Quickly I ran. Past palm trees, and – wait, there wasn’t anybody here! This place was deserted! Running faster than before, not looking were I was going, I ran into a palm tree. The squid picked me up. I screamed and closed my eyes, getting ready to be turned into a giant squid’s dinner. Then my eyes opened. I was sitting on my beach chair. I WAS DREAMING! I felt so stupid. I packed up my things, feeling silly.*

*The End*

It's only a matter of time before she wants to make Club Penguin machinima. If you don't know what that means, well, it's using *virtual environments to make your own movies*. People fire up online games, record the screen action in multiplayer environments according to a script. Add voices, edit it, voila. The sub-tween set is doing this in Club Penguin, Disney's online community – they type in dialogue, which appears in speech bubbles, and edit the screen captures to tell a story. It doesn't matter that it's rough and irregular; you have kids creating their own movies for a mass-distribution platform, and they get more views than M. Night got for opening week of his last movie. It's not that the world is changing – it already changed, and the new one is going on all around us under the noses of the adults.

Anyway. I put her to bed and worked on the Uniblab Mix for a while, and then I wrote 100 Mysteries. Discovered that the two projects had a remarkable commonality, as you'll see later today. I mean, really remarkable. What thin strand connected Uniblab to a 1932 movie? You'll have to wait.

**The exercise in the post** below this one – name that cartoonist – required some savvy about a subject obscure for most. But not me! No, I knew it! There's nothing like surrounding yousrself with small subjects about which you know a few things; makes a man feel *smart*. The only reason I knew the cartoonist was William Steig was because I saw his stuff in that large compendium of New Yorker cartoons we had at the house when I was growing up. I pored over that book until I had every one of them memorized, even if I didn't get them. Part of my childhood fascination with the Olden Times. It told me who Jimmy Walker and Belasco and Al Smith and John Held...
Jr. Were, but this isn’t information you can readily work into your daily life. Unless you have a blog.

I bring this up because I had a burrito tonight. So far, I haven’t brought up the burrito, which is good; all the cooks had shirts that said “Don’t Drink the Water,” ha ha because it’s Mexican food, full of amoebic dysentery. The burrito was six bucks, which seemed steep – until I saw it. The last time I held anything that big it was wet and screaming and had an umbilical cord attached. I took it home and got to work, relieved to find it was mostly rice, the gustatory equivalent of packing peanuts. When it was done I felt . . . Full, and though “I feel sorry for my rice.” Which led to a twitter remark:

If you have any dignity, apologize to the rice right now! (I DEFY anyone to name the movie that quote comes from.)

Of course, a flurry of replies nailed it: A Better Tomorrow, a 1986 John Woo movie with the very cool Chow Yun Fat. The only reason I knew it: a long, long time ago I had a real digitizer that could take sounds and convert them to computer files, and for years – from one computer to the next – I’ve dragged those files along, pieces of audio lint I can’t get out of my pocket. I could never hear them again and I’d still have them in my head, somewhere.

Anyway: some got the reference, as expected; the internet is a giant distributed information storage and retrieval system, and the most powerful tools are the meat-and-water units attached at the end by their fingertips. But some, it seemed, googled it. That’s fine. But it reminded me that there’s a difference between knowing a thing and knowing how it find it. Does the distinction matter? Well, yes. For obvious reasons, it helps to know how to make a fire, as opposed to knowing where you can get pdfs online of the Boy Scout Handbook. But knowing things lets you make connections in your head you can’t get with the web; the internet leads you from point A to point 85, and while it’s usually an interesting anabasis, all you remember at the end is how one damn thing leads to another, not connects to another. It’s as if we dump out a jigsaw puzzle on the table and compliment ourselves on seeing 500 pieces, instead of the picture they’re supposed to form.

I know, I know – I’m talking about knowing the source of an amusingly dubbed Hong Kong movie that concerns mock outrage over rice. I wonder if it’s on YouTube.

Sigh. I feel so stupid for thinking it wouldn’t be. (language warning.) Don’t worry; it switches to English for the pertinent parts. I suspect this is an iconic moment in Hong Kong movies, because rice is disrespected, and someone is shot in the leg for the crime.

I feel sorry with my rice:
I haven’t seen that since, oh, 1992. The things that stick in your mind. For example:

When I saw this, I thought immediately of Zippy the Pinhead.

Your morning challenge: why?

Later today: 100 mysteries, and perhaps the Uniblab Mix, if I finish it. Column at at StarTribune.com, and the now-traditional Lance Lawson up at buzz.mn. I have another column to write, and my father’s coming into town to see a basketball game. Friday looks grand.
38 RESPONSES TO *friday, march 20*

**zefal** says:
March 20, 2009 at 4:35 am

No offense Mr. Lileks but that kid of yours needs serious help… on how to spell the word “where”. Or you need to do a better job spellchecking when you post her stories on your site.

**Mumblix Grumph** says:
March 20, 2009 at 5:09 am

Yeah…the kid needs to learn how to use semicolons, too. And would it have been too much to ask for some iambic pentameter?

**GardenStater** says:
March 20, 2009 at 5:50 am

Only thing I can think of is the big polka dots on Zippy’s costume. Interesting clip, BTW.

And I thought (G)Nat’s story was great!

**hpoulter** says:
March 20, 2009 at 6:20 am

Ha – I know that one.

Zippy (Actually, Griffy, the cartoonist) is obsessed with Ernie Bushmiller’s “Nancy” and its spare and iconic visual landscape. He points out that one of the elements of Nancy and Sluggo’s world is the “three rocks” arrangement which appears in numberless Nancy panels.

**hpoulter** says:
March 20, 2009 at 6:37 am

I love meaningless connections between things. I remember how thrilled I was to discover the source of Obi Wan Jenobi’s Jedi finger-twiddle (“these aren’t the droids you’re looking for”). I’m sure it wasn’t in the script. Alec Guiness used exactly the same gesture in “The Ladykillers” (the 1955 Ealing Studios version) when the little old lady discovers the string quartet in her basement are actually bank robbers. He is trying desperately to convince her of some insanely unlikely excuse and he does the Jedi finger thing. Wonderful.

Since I am not James Lileks, I am not going to go get the DVD and grab a frame and post it somewhere to prove it, but it’s there.

**Jeff** says:
March 20, 2009 at 6:55 am

The Zen of the Three Rocks…. OOOOmmmmm.

**Greg Taylor** says:
March 20, 2009 at 7:20 am

Ahhh…..three rocks. We’re in Bushmiller Country now. Sluggo is my Co-Pilot.
hpoulter says:
March 20, 2009 at 7:59 am

Jenobi? I love this non-editable comment format. And zefal – I hope you were kidding. “Were” for “where” is a TYPO. We all do ‘em.

john peabody says:
March 20, 2009 at 8:46 am

“Three Rocks”– There was a large format collection of “Nancy” material, and it included some stips from “Zippy” where Ernie Bushmiller entered the strip advised Zippy that comedy is in ‘three rocks’. ‘Two?’ ‘No, three’. I bought that book…I dunno, 1992?

Gene Dillenburg says:
March 20, 2009 at 8:56 am

Jumping Jesus on a pogo stick — she's eight years old! Cut her some slack.

Marjorie J. Birch says:
March 20, 2009 at 9:05 am

The book of “Zippy” selections is “Are We Having Fun Yet?” It includes the Ernie Bushmiller/Zippy conversation re: three rocks versus two rocks or one rock.

I think of that conversation every time I look through my kitchen window. I live in a collection of townhomes (translation: suburban barracks) and some would-be landscape architect placed a large and irrelevant rock in the park-let out back. Maybe if I added two more rocks myself, it would annoy me less.

I was grateful to discover Zippy in the 1980s. He made that decade tolerable for me.

Casper says:
March 20, 2009 at 9:08 am

I thought I might be the first to get this . . . wrong! “Are We Having Fun Yet” came out in the 80′s, actually.

On a completely unrelated topic, Mr. Lileks, my wife's two sisters are the two little girls pictured in “Interior Desecrations.”

Bridey says:
March 20, 2009 at 9:45 am

“No offense Mr. Lileks but that kid of yours needs serious help…. on how to spell the word “where”. Or you need to do a better job spellchecking when you post her stories on your site.”

There should be commas before and after “Mr. Lileks.” The use of an ellipsis is very dubious here, and, in any event, in the middle of a sentence it should have three dots, not four.

“Serious help” is arguably idiomatic, but inarguably crude, and it should be “better job OF spellchecking.”

No offense.
Lileks says:
March 20, 2009 at 9:49 am

Whoa! Wich ones, and were?

Lileks says:
March 20, 2009 at 9:50 am

Yes, SERIOUS HELP indeed. I did proof the story a 2nd time before printing it off for class, and we went through the errors together. Serious help. Criminey.

jeff boulton says:
March 20, 2009 at 9:54 am

Whenever I see a little pile of rocks I think of The Blair Witch Project. Same planet, different worlds I guess.

hpoulter says:
March 20, 2009 at 10:13 am

You mean “Woal”?

Mikeski says:
March 20, 2009 at 10:17 am

No, pretty sure he meant “Woe”.

Al Federber says:
March 20, 2009 at 10:23 am

My parents were the opposite of manic, and I could have used more structure, but I do wonder about future blowback from kids who are continually being assessed and put through paces.

Bill Peschel says:
March 20, 2009 at 10:41 am

OK, now I'm downloading the machimina Chuck Norris off the original site.

Synchronisity alert (and, now, I'm not going to apologize for the gd spelling. Live wit it): Yesterday, I had iTunes up on the computer, set to Party Shuffle, and it came up with Bill Shatner’s “Common People” and “Captain Clanton” by one J. Lileks.

Whoa, as Spicoli would say.

George says:
March 20, 2009 at 10:55 am

Uniblab! “Spacely's a stupe! (click click) Spacely's a stupe!” I've always loved that character, he was so thoroughly rotten. Remember the one where Uniblab was the drill sergeant in Jetson's army reserve unit? good times.
DryOwlTacos says:
March 20, 2009 at 11:03 am

Didn't get the Zippy reference on the three stones, but my first thought was SkyNet.

Kev says:
March 20, 2009 at 11:29 am

@Bridey: Nice smackdown on zefal, who deserves it if he/she is serious. It could also be pointed out that the period after “where” should precede the quotation mark instead of following it. (The only exception would be If zefal is from England or Canada.)

@zefal: If you're serious, please lighten up. This is an elementary school kid we're (not “were”) talking about here. I teach people all the way up through the college level, and I've seen “were” misused in place of not only “where,” but “wear” and “we're” as well. (And if you weren't being serious, make sure your tags are turned on; I don't think your HTML worked that time.)

Margaret says:
March 20, 2009 at 11:48 am

Go Bison!

Joe the Painter says:
March 20, 2009 at 12:32 pm

Mmmmmmmmm, burritos… Hey, did you pick that burro up at Chipotle's? Considering it's owned by Mickey D, they don't wrap a bad burro...

Of course (oooh, I started with a preposition!), having lived in the Phoenix area for over ten years, I can confidently state that there ain't no Mexican food like Mexican Mexican food. Filiburto's was my favorite drive-through breakfast burro place, the size of a forearm and a preponderance of carne… But to sit down and eat? Ajo Al's every time. I'd order the Pollo con Qeso and ask the waiter to request that the “chef” prepare it HIS favorite way—He'd send it out on a 1-inch thick bed of jalapenos and a side of Pico-Pica….Nummy *slurp*...

MichaelsDaddy says:
March 20, 2009 at 1:00 pm

Oooh! Oooh! We had that New Yorker cartoon compendium. I remember that Al Smith cartoon, showing his influence on Washington: trees and Washington monument set off-kilter. Hilarious. And all the references to the Trylon and Perisphere introduced me to the 1939 World's Fair, and the wonder that it was.

Honestly don't remember the William Steig comics standing out though.

Covvie says:
March 20, 2009 at 1:05 pm

Hmm. No one else has picked up on the New Yorker cartoon book. My folks had the 25th Anniversary compendium of cartoons, the dates being 1925-1950. I, too, about had it memorized. The Steig
connection on the cartoon was easy. Names of cartoonists should perhaps also include Charles Addams, James Thurber, and Peter (?) Arno.

My folks also had a cartoon “best of” book from Punch. It was from the 1930s-early 1950s or so.

I have the Punch book. No idea whatever happened to the New Yorker volume, since my folks broke up the house in 2002 and moved to a Retirement Village in the Cincinnati area. Lot of stuff went missing right around then, including lots of family photos going back to the interim Old Country between life in Fiddler-on-the-Roof-land and here in The Land of Promise. Which it was to my great-grandparents. But I ramble…

Covvie says:
March 20, 2009 at 1:08 pm

Hmm. MichaelsDaddy hit the submit button first.

Oh, yeah, I remember that cartoon. It was a commentary on the influence of Al Smith during his run for the Presidency in 1928 against Hoover. He kept his hat/cap on his head slouched to the left. Even the KKK spooks marching along had their coneheads tilted!

Hmm. Wonder if Harry Turtledove could do an alternative history with Al Smith winning and the Great Crash and Depression beginning on Dems’ watch. The mind boggles. Mine does, anyway.

teach5 says:
March 20, 2009 at 2:44 pm

You might enjoy CDB by W. Steig. Delightful, and (G)Nat would enjoy it as well. What a terrific story–those lousy spelling assignments are devilish for most kids, but she knocked it out of the park–or beach, as the case may be. Warms your heart as a parent to see her talent, no?

Kev says:
March 20, 2009 at 7:02 pm

My 11:49 a.m. post above was supposed to tell zefal to make sure that his/her *sarcasm* tags were turned on next time, but I typed it in HTML and the program turned my own tag off (d’oh).

Steve Ripley says:
March 20, 2009 at 10:34 pm

In 2004 someone gave me “The Complete Cartoons of the New Yorker”. Extra cool part is it came with 2 CDs with all the cartoons in pdf format! Love it! Especially the George Booth cartoons featuring cats and a very grumpy Target dog (sans red target).

mpbk says:
March 21, 2009 at 10:24 am

Heh, I read that first comment above as sarc. The … is the tipoff.

Gina says:
March 22, 2009 at 11:38 am
I don’t suppose you need to be told this, but your kid has talent! That is very good indeed for an eight year old. (And that’s coming from an EXTREMELY persnickety editor.)

GardenStater says:
March 22, 2009 at 1:13 pm

I’m with Gina. (G)Nat has obviously inherited her Dad’s flair for the written word. Nice work, James!

Casper says:
March 23, 2009 at 8:00 am

Lileks—the photo in Interior Desecrations where the mother is in the kitchen looking out into the dining room at the two little girls, the caption makes a crack about drive-thru windows. Those two girls are my wife’s older sisters, their dad was in the PR business. Their mom made the dresses they’re wearing in the photo.

Ross says:
March 24, 2009 at 2:00 am

“…the period after ‘where’ should precede the quotation mark instead of following it. (The only exception would be if zefal is from England or Canada.)” Not necessarily—it used to be acknowledged as conditional here, but we’ve become too lazy & anti-intellectual to bother with whether a punctuation mark is part of the quote, or part of the sentence as a whole. I was taught the old way—thank you Miss McGucken— & still use it (to annoy those around me who think they know style, if nothing else).

Stella Rose says:
March 24, 2009 at 11:01 am

I am anxiously awaiting the day that (G)Nat follows in her daddy’s footsteps and writes a book. That small story is better than most of the dreck that is published these days. You go (G)Nat. That was awesome. p.s. I won’t live forever so, you had better get busy, kiddo.

Josh says:
March 27, 2009 at 4:49 pm

We made ‘machinima’ back in the mid-90s using Goldeneye. Huh, no idea I was so far ahead of the curve.
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.
Friday I usually work on the website, but I didn't. Worked on a song, instead: Happy Robot (Uniblab Mix.) It's currently #20 on amaze.fm – for the name of all that his true and decent and good, go over there, listen, and give it a good rating. I have an ulterior motive, and it needs your help. Go! I'll be here when you get back.

Went to a neighborhood French restaurant on Saturday. The cook was on strike and the cars in the parking lot were on fire. Hah! I kid, in my own loving way. It was civilized and tasty and expensive, but when it was over I was so full of steak I feel as if I should have married a baked potato. We went to the movie theater – yes, dinner and show, we really hit the town – and endured “Duplicity,” a movie that rests on the believe you find Julia Roberts a creature of constantly unfolding delights. Just to be in her presence is sufficient. Don’t worry, audience – the contract requires that she flash That Smile at least three times per picture, so you’ll get what you came for. It also had Clive Owen, who's great, but I had the same sinking feeling Bart and Homer felt while watching “Paint Your Wagon” and realizing that Lee Marvin was going to sing, instead of shoot guns. He seems small and a bit baffled in the movie. It's supposed to be a breezy suspense-comedy-caper film, but the comedy isn't, the suspense is attenuated over a running length that makes Wagner look like a YouTube short, and the caper takes for-fargin-ever to run its course.

Oh, and it has flashbacks! Long flashbacks that explain a little, but not a lot.
There's one that contains a gigantic WTF scene, and I swear I could feel the audience radiate wavy lines of unhappiness. The room got tense with displeasure. Every time a flashback began, you could feel the collective weariness of the room sigh and settle in place. It also seemed to end about 30 minutes before it did, and kept going out of some dogged desire to give you every possible opportunity to view Julia Roberts' teeth.

This is why I don't go to movies very much. It's ten bucks a shot, and I can read the room like an Empath. All that misery is simply too painful to bear.

Since last we spoke very little has happened. My father came into town on Friday to see the Bison play in the Metrodome, and it was good to see him. I dropped him off at the train station where he'd left for the war as a young kid; that's where North Dakotans met before the game to hobnob & mingle. An hour before he was supposed to come to the paper to get a ride home, I went outside to feed the meter – and was stopped by the security guard at the front desk. “There was a man here who said he was your father, and he lost his cell phone. He'll be back around two.”

Oh. Well. So: Dad's wandering around downtown Minneapolis, then. Doing what? I wondered why he just didn't use the front desk phone to call me. Or find a payphone. He had my number. Surely he can't have succumbed to the idea that if he loses his phone, he can't call mine. Although it does make a certain sort of simple sense. Well, he had a cellphone number from 1962, I think. Not the current one.

Eventually he showed up, but he had no tales of a picaresque adventure. Back to the house; wait for Natalie; a little family bonding ending with old-style parental affection, i.e., the Dreaded Pinch. Off he went to Fargo; off we went to piano.

After class was done Natalie looked in some unlocked lockers. Junk. The school's been decommissioned, turned into a community center. People leave things. This was the most depressing thing I'd seen all day:
Just one? The Secrets of Life, contained within! It makes you wonder if anything contained in that stack was used by anyone, read by anyone, affected any life, any moment of any day, or whether someone labored for weeks on the horrible project because it was their job to produce fifty-six pounds of DATA.

**Sunday:** dinner at the Convention Grill.
This is not an ersatz Diner. It's an old neighborhood with scars and scuffs, and the dining room is hideous – mirrors everywhere, 80s colors out of a Midwestern office-park bathroom. Nothing absorbs sound, so if you have a child channeling a monkey who just sat on a waffle iron, the sound will carom around the room for two or three minutes. The food is wonderful.

No one sits at the counter on a busy night; the cooks use it. This is original:
I wonder why the paint is so worn – does every other patron lunge for the doorknob, and miss?
Busy night, so scant offerings; more later. **Buzz.mn** is up – Matchbook later. See you around.

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### 26 RESPONSES TO *monday, march 23*

**micberma** says:
March 23, 2009 at 2:14 am

James – I work as a technical writer and I read your posting about the One Source of Data just as I was settling in at my desk to start my day. Now I'm depressed too! How could you? 😞
hpoulter says:
March 23, 2009 at 5:04 am

I love that title, too: “One Source of Data”. It's either ridiculously overblown “[THE] One Source of Data” or pathetically self-effacing “[Just] One Source of Data”. Either way, you can bet nobody read past the executive summary. I have written reports like that.

hpoulter says:
March 23, 2009 at 5:09 am

Beauty isn’t everything, God knows, but Julia Roberts has always puzzled me. Do women find her attractive? Do any men?

I guess if she didn’t have a mouth like a great white shark and a Pinocchio nose she would be attractive enough.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
March 23, 2009 at 6:45 am

Celebrity poaching is the lamest sport on Earth.

But it’s early, so I’ll take a shot.

Julia Roberts looks like a focus-group’s idea of an actress. Eternally skinny and a mouth made for Cinemascope. I've never seen her in a Mad Magazine satire, but I don’t think she’d look any different than on-screen.

She's everyone else's celebrity. She would be mine if she gave half her millions to a dental-aid charity.

Julia says:
March 23, 2009 at 9:26 am

Okay. What bothers me about Julia is that she walks like a trucker.

juanito - John Davey says:
March 23, 2009 at 9:27 am

*All that misery is simply too painful to bear.*

It's your burden. The artiste suffers for the rest of us.

I rarely go to the theater anymore either. Even our Netflix queue I usually pass on. My wife will remind me that we have 4 or more DVDs laying around, and she’ll end up watching them while I read, or attempt to break yet another Linux box.

Ms. Robert's projects end up being movies you MUST see because she's in it. Fairly disposable. As far as the hubba factor, I am at a loss. The fact that she had a body double for most of the grrrrwow scenes in Pretty Woman aptly categorized her for me.

Ed says:
March 23, 2009 at 10:05 am

I have grown despondent over modern cinema. The best time I had at the movies in recent times where when our local theater had a run of classic movies (Citizen Kane, The Adventures of Robin Hood, etc) and it was movies the way it was supposed to be. No one on the phone, no talking. My child came
with us for Robin Hood, and loved it. And it was free. ( AmEx paid for it for everyone ). I am hoping to see Cool Hand Luke there too.

Other than that, I just do Netflix. ( their streaming service is pretty nice, see Roku )

John Robinson says:
March 23, 2009 at 10:09 am

Apropos of nothing, was that waitress eating a lamb fry?

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 23, 2009 at 10:33 am

I never got Julia Roberts. The few minutes of Erin Brokovitch I saw made me despise her (could be because I can't stand the real Erin B.).

When I saw the ad for Duplicity during the Super Bowl, I wanted to cry. Why Clive, why?

Patrick McClure says:
March 23, 2009 at 10:36 am

James, The seemingly throw away references to your Dad left me wanting more. My WWII vet Dad died in 1991, and I never really had a good sit down talk with him about either growing up in the depression, or seeing the horror that Europe was in the war. I really wish I had, but he didn't like to talk about himself. The times before when you have written about your father have been some of my favorites of your writing. It gives me a picture of what things may have been like for my Dad. I hope his portion of Fargo stays dry.

Thanks for the usually funny and always entertaining writing.

Spud says:
March 23, 2009 at 11:00 am

Julia Roberts could be compared with Debra Winger, in that both of them had cinema success when paired with Richard Gere. They both tried their hands with drama and comedy, and both seemed to slip from the spotlight as they aged into their late 30's. Once women in Hollywood get to a certain age, they're left with mom/supporting roles (besides Streep), and audiences still would rather see older man-younger woman pairings than the other way around.

Charlie Young says:
March 23, 2009 at 11:11 am

“child channeling a monkey who just sat on a waffle iron” was an image that sticks in my mind now for the rest of the day. The comment still brings a smile to my face.

I take it you aren't interested in the remakes of classics e.g. “Johnny Rockets” restaurants.

Margaret says:
March 23, 2009 at 2:39 pm

The Convention Grill is really like an old diner with all the up and down sides. Noise, crowded tables etc. Burgers and malts in a jillion
and one flavors. Yum! Not what I think of when I think of tony Edina so it's kind of a hidden treasure. It wears its history well like that door plate.

**Michael Rittenhouse** says:
March 23, 2009 at 2:55 pm

My reply would've been so much funnier if I'd said Roberts had a “16:9 mouth.”

James, can we have an EDIT button?

**gmann63** says:
March 23, 2009 at 3:56 pm

Yeah, I never got the Julia Roberts allure, either. In fact, she may be my least favorite actress of all time, although I harbor no real enmity for her. I just can’t see what the attraction is and I'll actively avoid a movie in which she has the lead role.

**Rick Terrell** says:
March 23, 2009 at 4:33 pm

I just got home from work, and discovered that James' song on Amaze.fm had slipped from #1 to #2 during the day….I finally cast my vote, and – back to #1! I know there's a long way to go, but I hope I can be the one to put you over the top, at least for now.

**Ricky Suerte** says:
March 23, 2009 at 5:20 pm

Is that waitress eating off somebody's plate? Or maybe she's on meal break?

**Marjorie J. Birch** says:
March 23, 2009 at 5:58 pm

Glory be. I thought I was the only one in the world who failed to appreciate the alleged acting talent of Julia Roberts and her damned smile. Some day she is going to grin a bit too widely — the corners of her mouth will merge and the top of her head will fall off.

**NeeNee** says:
March 23, 2009 at 6:57 pm

I do not get this at all. Maybe at almost-61, I'm a fuddy. Just tremendously irritating.


**Shelley** says:
March 23, 2009 at 6:58 pm

I still can't understand how people can smile and show their wisdom teeth and 5 mm. of gum. I try to do that and it looks like a grimace of death.

Nobody I know finds Julia Roberts attractive or particularly likes any of her movies. She plays herself in almost every movie. My
daughter flipped to “My Best Friend’s Wedding” yesterday and I told her to turn the damned thing off.

**Bridey** says:
March 23, 2009 at 7:49 pm

Huh. I get to the movies nearly every week, and I haven't noticed any special level of misery in the crowds. In fact, we all seem to enjoy ourselves, at least as often as not.

And to my eye, anyway, the good-to-crap ratio for movies just doesn't change that much from one era to the next. There's plenty of good stuff out there — but it's not generally going to be found at wacky caper movies with Julia Roberts in them. I mean, if you ignore the warning signs, whaddya expect?

**GardenStater** says:
March 23, 2009 at 9:40 pm

Sorry, guys—I think Julia's pretty fine. As they say, there's a lid for every pot.

And that's some fine retro diner. Bet their corned-beef hash is deelish!

**Defrost Indoors** says:
March 23, 2009 at 9:47 pm

I've never gotten the appeal of Miz Roberts either; I think she's the cinematic equivalent of those whistles only dogs can hear.

Her mother was from Minneapolis, apparently...

**Defrost Indoors** says:
March 23, 2009 at 9:48 pm

Hear, not here. Good grief!

**jamcool** says:
March 23, 2009 at 10:00 pm

Happy Robot sounds a bit like “Autobahn” die Kraftwerk!

**Loge** says:
March 23, 2009 at 10:16 pm

WTF, no shot of the pattern in the formica?

Seriously – God bless your dad, James. I lost my (Pacific theater WWII Navy vet) in 2002, miss him every day.
My wife is out of town for a week. I pity the henpecked sorts who must seethe with envy – aw, gee, he'll get to leave his socks on the floor for days on end, and he can play games and visit that new free Playboy site without hooking a rear-view mirror to his monitor and a proximity alarm – but no, that's not me. There's not a Married Me and a Free Me. I will, however, probably throw out a few things that should be recycled, just because it feels so naughty. It's all the modern man has left, when it comes to rebellion. Even our pieties are petty.

I saw this the other day:

Well, no, it's not. If it is, then when am I giving it to my dog? Why is the toilet
bowl full of it? You can say every drop is important, and overstate the case but make your point, but if all water is holy, then the North Dakota flood is the greatest act of grace we’ve seen since the last time people lost their homes to a tide of unstoppable inundation of holiness.

It’s not the first time Fargo has had a flood.

That’s Dad’s station in the ‘65 flood.

This may be my new oath for the rest of the week:

Not just niblicks, but suffering niblicks. I think I speak for many when I say our niblicks have indeed suffered over the last year, and I look forward to the days when we can once again shout Holy Happy Niblicks, and everyone will
know what we mean.

It’s from “Spring Fever,” one of the many old Warner Brothers movies I will not be paying $15.00 to own. I’d like to see it, but that seems a bit steep. The new Warner Brothers store is a cool idea, and I know I’ll pop for a few of these – but the price is set higher than I’d like. And I’m not one of those “should be free” or “99 cents is too much” types. I’d pay ten dollars to see an old obscure movie that’s been out of circulation for a long time.

It makes me grind my teeth, though, when I read about something like this – an extraordinary chance to see old movies locked away for decades – and the comments consist of “meh. torrents ftw.” I can understand using torrents to find strange obscure things you simply cannot get elsewhere. But these antisocial kiddies expect to be compensated for their own work someday, yet think nothing of sucking up yesterday’s movie or expensive software. Always love the rationales: A) it’s not stealing because you’re taking a copy, and B) they couldn’t afford the software anyway so they’re not losing a customer.

Anyway. Wife’s gone; took her to the airport after I did the NewsBreak Extra. Probably shouldn’t have said “now with Retsyn!” when introducing the segment, but what the hell. Made two mistakes, which grieves to no end. Should NOT make mistakes. Note to self: no more mistaeks. Went home, wrote the next day’s buzz – it’s the weekly Small Town Website, chosen at random. Most are horrible. I find it interesting that people want a new WPA for writers, like the old one, when the government sent Frank Bolsh to Sepia Flats, Oklahoma to record the life stories of itinerant twig-sexers.

“Well, my pappy was a twig sexer, and his pappy was one in th’ Ozarks until the plague came along and carried off Maw – by plague I mean them big black birds with the great big claws, we called ‘em “Plague Birds” after Plague County, where’n most of ’em done roost – and then we moved west on account of the twig-smut pretty much rooned our livelihood in Missouri. (spits) So we set up here and I got a job in town tellin’ the orchard-man whether his twigs was male or female, until they got to bringin’ science down on our heads and tellin’ us weren’t no such thing as a twig havin’ a sex, and even if they did it weren’t no difference no how, so we been here in this shack waitin’ for a photographer to come along and take a pitcher of us lookin’ all grim and thin but, you know, bearin’ up. You brought a photographer, din’t you? Don’t tell me you’re jist writin’ this down and that’s it.”

If we had a WPA program, and I don’t think we should, I’d use it to hire web designers, and let them fix every small town website that still thinks it’s 1999. I swear, some of these sites are so old you expect to see links to AOL homepages.

Do they still have those? Oh, right: they shut down Hometown. But they have Bebo! Yes, Bebo! It appears to be some sort of MySpace/Facebook thing with extra-concatenated Social Networking. Because we don’t have enough of that.
If there's one thing I ache for the web to outgrow, it's the infantile nature of these names. Meebo! Bebo! It's like a two-year-old child's word for flatulence. MySpace! Facebook! The latter is something you'd show to an infant to make them smile with hard-wired recognition.

So. Later today we'll have the website; around noon, the Comic Cover; around 1:30, a Black and White World with a satisfying payoff for movies-on-cable fans. Trust me. See you soon.

29 RESPONSES TO tuesday, march 24

juanito - John Davey says:
March 24, 2009 at 12:55 am

But these antisocial kiddies expect to be compensated for their own work someday, yet think nothing of sucking up yesterday's movie or expensive software.

You can have it now, but you've got to pay for it later … or not.

Ross says:
March 24, 2009 at 3:09 am

Bebo? In the old Archie McFee catalogues (back when it was black & white, full of weird, funny & cheap stuff, not made for them faux-retro schlock and the product descriptions were the best part), there was a running joke from issue to issue about this bizarre Asian-made half-simian-half-alien-infant alarm clock. People were always writing in to suggest a better name (since the packaging didn't really say what it was called), but the catalogue writers tended to call it “Bebo”, after the annoying alarm sound. “Plate o' shrimp”, indeed…

bellczar says:
March 24, 2009 at 3:35 am

Did the station have your dad's name over the door? I remember the Texaco in the town where I was raised said over the doors Herb Wilson … Marfak Lubrication … Car Wash. I thought Marfak was another guy who worked there. But that was about the time I thought a republic was the thing that you stuck the little flag in on the blackboard. “And to the republic for which it stands…”

hpoulter says:
March 24, 2009 at 6:09 am

I don't remember “Bebo”, but I remember “Obie”, the little eye-popping martian doll.

But these antisocial kiddies expect to be compensated for their own work someday

How quaint. C'mon Lileks, get with the 21st century. Why should they have to “work” to be compensated? They have a “right” to entertainment, just like the right to “health care” and “housing”.

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=1656
doesn't entail any effort or expenditure on their part.

Virtual Memories says:
March 24, 2009 at 6:40 am

You DO know a “niblick” is a 9-iron and not gibberish, right? So the “sufferin' niblicks” line fits in the context of the “hole in one” part.

Chris says:
March 24, 2009 at 6:49 am

Loved newsbreak. Quite funny.

mcsage says:
March 24, 2009 at 8:07 am

I think you proceed from false assumptions..
“But these antisocial kiddies expect to be compensated for their own work someday.”

I'm not sure that they do. I think many of them actually expect to live in a socialist utopia, where all things are readily available to all persons.
And robots do all the work, of course…

Smiley says:
March 24, 2009 at 8:25 am

“If there's one thing I ache for the web to outgrow, it's the infantile nature of these names. Meebo! Bebo!”

Twitter?

HunkyBob says:
March 24, 2009 at 8:37 am

If every drop is holy why do you need to sanctify it before baptisms? Hah! Got you.

Agreed the social networking names are silly… Facebook, MySpace, Twitter…

On the other hand they are short, easy to remember and roll off the tongue… I really can't think of other better names for these things.

a reader says:
March 24, 2009 at 8:38 am

You would think a guy caught up in nostalgia so much wouldn't consider not recycling an act of rebellion, but rather anti-conservative, if you know what conserve means. Would you have thrown away your tin cans and rubber bands during WWII just to spite those self-righteous do gooders always on their sanctimoneous “drives”?

Al Federber says:
March 24, 2009 at 9:25 am

@a reader: WWII junk drives were mostly hollow propaganda,
something to make folks on the “home front” feel more directly involved in the killing.

hpoulter says:
March 24, 2009 at 9:25 am
“a reader” – I bet I know what the “a” stands for. Chill. It's a joke, pendajo.
Besides:
“Recycling is the philosophy that says everything is worth saving except your time”

Cyn Mackley says:
March 24, 2009 at 9:42 am
For the love of all that is holy James, What about Marge? What about truth? Please, please post the solution to LL!

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 24, 2009 at 9:45 am
Every drop is sacred.
Every drop is great.
If a drop is wasted,
Gore gets quite irate.
Let the deniers spill theirs
On the dusty ground.
Gore shall make them pay for
Each drop that can’t be found.

Richard Durbin says:
March 24, 2009 at 10:08 am
But these antisocial kiddies expect to be compensated for their own work someday, yet think nothing of sucking up yesterday's movie or expensive software.
It's one of those concepts that some folk have trouble with. Say your mechanic fixes car. You pay him, and go about your business. No need to pay him again everytime you use the car. But with software/movies, well do the work once then get paid forever.
I know, I know, more complicated than that, but superficially, it's what makes them feel like it's alright to ignore copyright ownership.

Dave says:
March 24, 2009 at 10:17 am
Ahhh, St Joan of Arc. Where the Catholic church merges with Neo-Pagen nature worshipping.

alex. says:
March 24, 2009 at 10:31 am
“Sufferin' niblicks”? Nah, I'll take “Heavens to Murgatroid!” anyday.

hpoulter says:
March 24, 2009 at 10:45 am

When he was overwrought, my Dad used to say:

“Great Gobs of African Bear Hair!”

I still use it. It rolls off the tongue nicely.

a reader says:
March 24, 2009 at 10:58 am

“I bet I know what the “a” stands for. … pendajo.”

I would have thought that if Lileks were to have a moderator for his Bleats, he would want one that isn’t a name caller. Oh well.

Gary says:
March 24, 2009 at 11:26 am

Hard to argue with the torrent punks when Warners charges $15 for a film in which everyone involved the production is dead. And most or all of them worked for hire. Talk about chasing in on corpses. $5 seems reasonable.

RLR says:
March 24, 2009 at 12:10 pm

I don’t know about you people, but when I click on that WB link, they want to charge me twenty smackers, not fifteen!

James probably has a side deal going with WB for a perpetual five buck discount. 😊

Prescott Carlson says:
March 24, 2009 at 12:50 pm

“If there's one thing I ache for the web to outgrow, it's the infantile nature of these names.”

If you look at a website as a product, goofy, infantile product names have been around for ages, no? It doesn't help that there's a notion floating around out there that domains of 5 letters or less are somehow more “valuable.”

DryOwlTacos says:
March 24, 2009 at 12:54 pm

Just hazarding a guess that these DVDs from the WB grooveyard of forgotten films might be POD-duped to order rather than pulled from stock—hence the inflated price.

hpoulter says:
March 24, 2009 at 1:07 pm

That's right – these are “printed” on demand. I may or may not buy any, but I’m not insulted or indignant about the price. Them that wants them enough will buy them. There are plenty of cheap used
DVDs out there that you can buy legally. And more PD stuff is showing up online all the time. archive.org has over 1700 “feature films” for free download. Most are forgettable, but there are some really good ones, as well.

Al Federber says:
March 24, 2009 at 1:34 pm

@RLR – James’ side deal with Disney likely precludes any such arrangement with Warner bros.

Jerry Ray says:
March 24, 2009 at 1:38 pm

Yep, $15 for downloads, $20 for “print on demand” physical copies.

I understand they need to recoup their expenses for digitizing and making the material available, and I understand that they're a company in the business to make money, but yeah, $15 for a download seems a little high. But I guess it's down to “either we charge this much for it so you have the ability to see it if you want to, or it'll just languish in our vaults forever until all the masters rot away.”

hpoulter says:
March 24, 2009 at 3:06 pm

Now, if you want some on-demand entertainment, with the money going right to the artists ($10/download or $15/DVD) throw some business to these fine folks:

https://cinematictitanic.twinvision.com/products/

Lileks says:
March 24, 2009 at 5:04 pm

Couldn’t agree more. And Rifftrax.com, too.

Lisa P says:
March 24, 2009 at 8:26 pm

There are definately some silly names out there, but I’m not sure Facebook is one. I’m not a Facebook geek. I have a page, but I mostly use it because it's the easiest way to communicate with friends. I don't even have a profile, and if you throw me a sheep or try to turn me into a vampire or zombie, I will completely ignore it.

[disclaimer]

All that being said, way back before these networking sites existed, I worked at a major university that published a yearly book featuring pictures of students, faculty and staff. This served to put faces to names, and made a big place seem a little smaller. We called it the “facebook”.

Facebook started as exactly the same thing – it featured college students, faculty and staff. Now that it has “sold out” to the general public, maybe it is a silly name, but at least there's a logical reason for the name.

I agree with the earlier comment – Twitter is a silly name. But fun, am I right?
Natalie declared this the best day ever, and I can’t argue. At least on her terms. I gave her mac and cheese for supper and her new Nintendo DS game arrived. Also, we skipped church choir and I let her get into jammies at 5 PM. Mommy goes, and all the rules evaporate.

Momentous news:

1. The Jimmy “Jim” Lileks show begins shooting its second “season” this week. At least we’re shooting the new opening. O the plans I have for this one. Here’s the pitch: my stupid, vain, self-regarding twin brother is irritated that his stupid, vain, self-regarding got the nod to be on the NewsBreak show, so he’s going to do his own news show, the way it should be done. We’re going to shoot it in the basement of the Strib, which is a fascinating wasteland of cast-off office equipment and archaic machinery. It’s Mad-Max land down there. Perfect for this project.

2. This was the day the next novel clicked. Can’t say more, but all the tumblers finally fell into place and the great door of the plot swung open. I’m kicking myself, because it’s been obvious for about ten years what I wanted to write about, but it took the last two years to give me what I needed to know to write it.
So that's good. Inauspicious start, though; slept so hard I could not focus at close range for about two hours after I woke up. Good thing the TelePrompTer is nine feet away. Did the second “Extra!” portion of NewsBreak, which I prefer to anchoring, really. More room for the occasional micrometer-thin jape. Finished, then took my mother-in-law to the airport – she didn’t have a flight, I was just tired of her. Kidding! It’s been a nice visit, and I wanted to hop on the plane myself and follow her back to AZ. Find a nice house in DC Ranch with a negative-edge pool and view of the mountains and enjoy a year in luxury before I default like everyone else. As I said to someone later in the day in another context, it’s the losers who aren’t declaring bankruptcy these days. Bankruptcy is for the brave. Bankruptcy is for closers.

**I'm turning my old Mac Mini** into a media center, because the Apple TV is a nice piece of equipment that drives me out of my head. I know this is the future and we should be happy to stream everything wirelessly, but I tire of loading 1.4 GB movies on the thing via the ether. It would be nice to just plug in a drive and sent it. Since I have an old unused Mini, I thought I’d give it a try. First step: I needed a DVI to HDMI cable. Went to Radio Shack. Got one of those clerks who seemed to believe in Radio Shack. It was part of his self-identity. I’m all for guys being proud of their job, and can’t stand the places where you get the Pimply-Faced Dolt who hates the customers because they’re lame for coming in this lame place and everything sucks except that one part in “Watchman” but yeah, overall that sucked too. The only thing different between these guys and the losers of yore is that computers gave them something to be good at. But even that sucks, because they have to deal with people aren’t good at computers and write stupid things on engadget.

But this guy seemed to have pride in the Radio Shack Way, and that was fine – until it seemed as if he took Radio Shack japes personally. He said they were having a sale on batteries, and I laughed and said “you’re kidding! I’ve never seen that happen before!” Every time I’ve ever been to Radio Shack they’ve had a sale on batteries. He seemed to take it personally, as though poking gentle fun at Radio Shack I was poking fun at him. I understand, in a way, but son: try working for a newspaper.

He told me that Duracell made Radio Shack’s batteries, by the way. We agreed that Energizer and Duracell were equally good, and Rayovac, well, sucked, but you kinda knew that, and they didn’t pretend otherwise. Like, Rayovac is what you get when you’re just tired of paying a lot for batteries.

So we parted as friends. Off to Best Buy to see if they had the cable any cheaper. OH, STOP LAUGHING. Worth a try. A clerk came up and asked if I
needed assistance, and I told him I wanted to pay about four times more for a cable than I needed. He nodded and had someone direct me to cables.

“What kind you need?” he said.

“DVI to HDMI.”

“How long?”

“Oh, I’ve needed it for about two weeks now.”

He nodded. Seriously: he just nodded. Because they only have one length anyway. The cable was 50 bucks, and it wasn’t even Monster. So I said no, thank you, and went to the Mac department to look for something else.

While I was poking at some machines I had great fun eavesdropping on an interview a Minnesota Public Radio fellow was conducting with a young kid – shopping habits, opinions about Best Buy vs. Wal-Mart, Mac vs. Apple, and so on. They started talking about newspapers and other media when the interview was done, and I kept hearing names I knew from my own job, and so eventually I just elbowed my way into the conversation. When the kid said his dad used to work at the Pioneer Press, and gave his name, my jaw dropped, because the guy’s my age, and I’m so fargin’ self-absorbed sometimes I forget some people started reproducing at the usual age. Spitting image, too. Or spit & image? Latter.

We talked about the difficult times for media, and I rolled out my usual polyanna lines. Remember, the Chinese character for “Difficulty” is the same for “taking an ungreased I-beam up the fundament.” Also for “Opportunity.”

**Last night** Natalie needed me to pretend I was staying upstairs for the rest of the night while she slept, so I sat in my studio and made small noises. Picked up the 9000 lb. “Store Fronts” book I mentioned the other day. The old metal neon signs, as noted, seemed stable and permanent and grown-up in a way the hand-painted signs don’t – possibly because the latter were often amateurish. It’s authentic and genuine and probably a form of folk art, but I have no interest in it. The stuff from the 60s and 70s is awful; after that, it’s glossy work that looks like it could come out an auto detailing shop. Someone
could do a thesis on it, I suppose, but it's still ugly.

That last sentence works for a lot of things.

Some of the stores have little bios. This one explained a lot. The owner's discussing his sign.

I almost lost my entire business because of that sign. It used to be a very small fee the City charged in order to keep an illuminated neon sign on your business.

At this point I frowned: eh? Why a fee for a sign? I can imagine a landlord charging a fee if you want to hang something on his building, but why should the city be able to levy a fee for sign? Because it can, of course.

I remember paying about $76 a year and then they slowly raised it and when it reached over $200, I wrote a letter to the city that I would not be renewing the permit.

But in the early 1980s I got a letter from the City saying that they had foreclosed on my business because I hadn't paid by neon sign permit fees.

(gnashing teeth)

I was so upset because my whole life is in this store and they were going to take it away from me. I had to hire a lawyer and go to City Court and fight to get my store back. I ended up having to pay the city $1,200 in order to own my business again.

The quote begins thus:

I bought this store in 1962 and put up the neon sign that is still out there today. I don't keep it lit anymore.

So there's another reason why the streets look different: they banned
overhanging signs, possibly because one or two fell down in the middle of the night, and the specter of General Smushing was used to eliminate what some no doubt believed was archaic clutter. The neon signs started winking out one by one because store owners didn't want to pay the fee. Somewhere there's the grave of a bureaucrat who came up with that idea. It doesn't say THE MAN WHO HELPED KILL NEON, but we're rarely known by such things.

Later today: a brain-building rebus from 1924; the Minneapolis Update; Miscreant Round-up at buzz.mn. See you in the comments.

44 RESPONSES TO Wednesday, March 25

Walter in Buffalo says:
March 25, 2009 at 1:13 am

Geez, sounds like those merchants were victimized by the neon bubble. Too bad we didn't bail them out, too.

Ken J says:
March 25, 2009 at 1:49 am

Maybe that's why Seattle has an awning tax, to make up for the missing neon.

Charlie X says:
March 25, 2009 at 4:16 am

Missing neon in Seattle? I think not
http://www.flickr.com/search/?q=seattle%20neon&w=all

Jim T says:
March 25, 2009 at 6:50 am

See monoprice.com for your cable needs, they have gold-plated DVI to HDMI starting at about $4.00.

I have no affiliation with monoprice other than that I am a highly satisfied and $$$ saving customer.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
March 25, 2009 at 7:01 am

The Chinese-character-for-crisis trope has become so Michael Scott that I use it to sucker people in.

“You know the Chinese character for crisis ...” (heads start nodding)
“... has another meaning as well. It means, in the Cantonese dialect, ‘Find someone to blame.’

“In Mandarin, it’s ‘Take the afternoon off and pretend you weren’t
in the loop.’
“In Sichuan, it’s ‘General Tso chicken, extra hot.’”

**Martin** says:
March 25, 2009 at 7:05 am

Just order all your cables from Amazon. Best prices anywhere from their third-party vendors.

**Locomotive Breath** says:
March 25, 2009 at 7:09 am

These guys are good too…

**ajtooley** says:
March 25, 2009 at 7:14 am

You certainly don’t need my help coming up with ideas, but I have been playing with chromakeying in iMovie 09, and have been pleasantly …stunned, actually, with the quality. It wouldn’t take a whole lot of effort to have your stupid, vain, self-regarding twin brother sneak a peek at the other one taping a news show.

**Blackwing1** says:
March 25, 2009 at 7:34 am

Another local source for cables (in case you don’t want to wait the two days for delivery) is to try Menards. Yes, the “save big money at…” place sells a pretty good variety of A/V cables, including HDMI. Usually for less than half of what Best Buy is charging for the same product. Check it out in their Electrical department (poke around on the mezzanine-level in the one at 78th and Nicollet).

**HunkyBob** says:
March 25, 2009 at 7:57 am

“Mac vs. Apple”… Kind of like a fight between you and your evil twin, no?

**mpc** says:
March 25, 2009 at 8:02 am

Just echoing the monoprice sentiment above. I too have a mac-mini media center and all my cabling for it was purchased there for about 10 bucks. They have both the DVI-HDMI and the toslink optical cable you’ll need for running sound to your receiver.

**hpoulter** says:
March 25, 2009 at 8:04 am

At least Radio Shack doesn’t ask you for your freaking address every time you want to buy something. That used to drive me wild. I think they knew it was killing them, but it was the Big Boss's idea, and they had to wait for him to retire or die before they could drop the practice.

I got asked for my home address at a Radio Shack in BANGKOK!!
Then I had to wait while the clerk (who could barely read English) painstakingly transcribed my address from my driver's license into her terminal. I was looking forward to getting sales circulars from Thanon Sukhumvit (this week only – save big Baht), but they never showed up.

Later, I tried to tell that story to a RS clerk in the States, but it just made him grumpy and defensive (“We have to ask”).

Lars Walker says:
March 25, 2009 at 8:43 am

Those who have never known the frustration of writing a novel can never imagine the satisfaction experienced in the moment when “all the tumblers fall into place.” For a moment, you're Dickens, you're Proust, you're John Updike.

“Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have missed me.
Say I'm growing old, but add–
The tumblers fell into place for me once.”

Ernie G says:
March 25, 2009 at 8:46 am

“Bankruptcy is for closers.”

Second prize is a set of steak knives.

Joe the Painter says:
March 25, 2009 at 9:31 am

A friend of mine many years ago was an engineer for Duracell in North Carolina...She told me that she would OFTEN see Energizer batteries on the line, having their “skirts” swapped for Duracell. She said it happened because sometimes one division of the plant couldn't keep up with another...

Doesn't matter though; ALL companies will be ACME before the Current Occupant gets done consolidating industry...

Emd says:
March 25, 2009 at 9:46 am

That neon sign story has filled me with fury. Government, getting in the way. Again.

Deb_in_Madison says:
March 25, 2009 at 9:48 am

Here in Madison, the city is going after the new owners of a downtown theater because the theater owners are “balking at paying for the encroachment into city air space caused by their marquee sign, a designated historic landmark.” The annual fee is $1200 which is on top of their $25,000 tax bill. The fee was never paid by the previous owners.

http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=25182
Yang Wei says:
March 25, 2009 at 9:48 am

Speaking of Chinese characters, how is Nat enjoying GTA:CW?

juanito - John Davey says:
March 25, 2009 at 9:55 am

Bankruptcy is for closers.
Always Be Closing!

Or, so says Alec Baldwin.

Our 14 year old redwood fence is in need of repair. Not major, structural, repair, but freshening up. Plus the Houdini the Labrador keeps finding week spots. A third of an acre consumes a tremendous amount of 1 X 4 5Ft Dogeared boards. Got about 90 boards for an emergency repair (that DOG) at the local redwood lumber yard. It's been there forever, and now they are building the new Town Center (that looks just like a Mediterranean downtown that's already 100 years old) around it. They've always been pricey, but ye gads, the quality! About $1.70 a board, but they were gorgeous (com'on it's just a fence, do I really need that? Okay, they go out front for curb appeal). Repairs done, it looks great.

Went to Home Depot to price a purchase of about 500 additional boards. Lower quality, $1.98 a board. $0.28 more per board for lower quality? Thanks for nothing.

Swung by the local redwood yard in Sacramento close to my daytime office, but 30 miles from home. They have a larger redwood inventory than Home Depot, so obviously some buying power. $0.36 a board. Yes, $0.36 CENTS. Quality better than Home Depot, but not the vanity quality of the lumber yard near the house.

So why can't Home Depot, or Best Buy get value products? They DO have buying power. I suspect it's bureaucracy in their purchasing departments.

Mark S. says:
March 25, 2009 at 9:56 am

Natalie must have gotten the Pokemon Platinum game that my daughter has had her head buried in lately.

Will says:
March 25, 2009 at 10:03 am

I'll second the monoprice.com recommendation. HDMI cables are obscenely overpriced in most retail stores. You'd think they were made from only the finest unicorn hair, rather than some cheap plastic and copper wire.

swschrad says:
March 25, 2009 at 10:19 am

I'll have you know that Rayovac alkalines have been doing the job for me for 5 years. plus, they're on sale about half the time at Menards.

fun fact: P. R. Mallory invented the alkaline battery, they spun off Duracell, Inc. try to find a trace of Mallory any more. don't count the
piece of capacitor business that vishay picked up.

Lars Walker says:
March 25, 2009 at 10:49 am

I have never forgiven Duracell for those teeth-grinding “plastic people” TV advertisements years back. I’ve boycotted them ever since. I know it’s a dead issue, and the offense is long past, but you can’t insult my intelligence to that degree and expect me to forget.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 25, 2009 at 10:59 am

“Natalie declared this the best day ever”

I just want to thank Sponge Bob Squarepants who has brought back being positive for positive’s sake.

F is for Friends who do stuff together.
U is for You and me.
N is for Anywhere and anytime at all.
Down here in the deep blue sea!

Mr. Sun came up and he smiled at me
Said “it’s gonna be a good one, just wait and see”
Jumped out of bed, and I ran outside
Feeling so ecstatic, satisfied.

It's the best day ever (best day ever)
It's the best day ever (best day ever)

Tom says:
March 25, 2009 at 11:00 am

Just a quick word on HDMI cables: since it’s digital, the actual quality of the signal passing through it isn’t impacted by the quality of the wire itself. Remember: it’s all 1s and 0s, so a mediocre cable won’t start passing along 0.5s. The quality has to do with the rate at which the cable will fail—a big deal if you’re running one of these babies up behind drywall and don’t want to have to replace it.

Of course, if you’re not going to do that, my advice is to find the cheapest one available and buy 5-10 of them (found some 6’ models a while back on Amazon for like $1.99 apiece). You never know when you’ll need them, can always replace one that breaks (still a rarity), and impress others with your excess supply of HDMI cables.

Al Federber says:
March 25, 2009 at 11:04 am

Many years ago, I saw an interesting presentation about signage ordinances and the anti-capitalism forces behind them. Projected on a screen was a color night view of the Tokyo Ginza shopping district in full-blown neon glory. All the signs were in Japanese, and incomprehensible to the audience. The presenter asked the audience what they thought of the picture, and everybody said it was beautiful, which it was. Then a color night view of New York City was shown to the room. It was just as dramatic and full of neon color as the Tokyo view, but the signs were in English. The reaction of the crowd to this photo was generally negative, simply because they could perceive a commercial message.
Iplimac says:
March 25, 2009 at 11:09 am

Do not believe that “Energizer and Duracell were equally good.” I work a company that, among other things, tests COTS (Commercial of the shelf- company does military type stuff) batteries and in the opinion of the Labs chief scientist, who's job is to know these kind of things, Energizer are way inferior to Duracell. Too bad our purchasing people never got that memo, as all they buy are, sadly Energizers. And we pay for that decision... oh how we pay...

DensityDuck says:
March 25, 2009 at 12:09 pm

Al: In a way, I think that's why I like to watch anime subtitled rather than dubbed. When it's subtitled, it's like you're watching opera; the emotions are more important than the dialogue. It doesn't matter that they're terrible actors--you don't understand the language, so you don't actually KNOW that they're terrible.

DensityDuck says:
March 25, 2009 at 12:15 pm

Signs: And, see, that's the problem with government by the regulatory model. YOU DON'T ELECT THE REGULATORS. Regulators are civil servants, and there only two ways a civil servant can involuntarily lose their job: A) die, or B) get caught in the act of looking at porn online. The closest any of them ever came to an election is that their boss's boss's boss's boss's boss is the President.

And yet they control your life more intimately than the President could ever hope to do. The President needs the approval of 535 members of Congress to do anything, but a bureaucrat in a regulatory agency can destroy every neon sign in America just by sending an email.

DensityDuck says:
March 25, 2009 at 12:15 pm

Novel: Is it Joe Ohio?!?! Please say yes!

Dawn says:
March 25, 2009 at 12:15 pm

My two cents on inexpensive cables: newegg.com A 6 ft. DVI to HDMI (M-M) is $8-$16...of course they have the $50-$70 option if you want to feel superior because you spent more 😆

Bribo says:
March 25, 2009 at 12:36 pm

You could always Boxee your AppleTV like I've done. You can then use Boxee to stream movies, TV shows, etc. You don't need to load anything on the ATV at all. Boxee is incredibly easy to install as well.

stubby says:
March 25, 2009 at 1:13 pm
Ok, someone fill me in – I've been away for a while. When did Gnat become Natalie? I'm assuming it was her wish – did she decide she was too old to be Gnat?

Ken J says:
March 25, 2009 at 1:24 pm

Charlie X, I hard the larger, exterior neons signs in mind when I wrote that. Most of the neon you linked to were small signs, a lot of them in windows.

But what I was really responding to was what James said about regulation and taxes, and that Seattle has an awning tax.

Lileks says:
March 25, 2009 at 1:32 pm

That was my decision – seemed apt, since she was now 8, and gave me nasty looks when she read “Gnat” on the screen. Gosh, I wonder why.

stubby says:
March 25, 2009 at 1:37 pm

Ah.

My seven yeard old is growing tired of Tomboy Diva. Right now I'm calling her Shumpy, as she's on crutches for a month. She doesn't like that one either. Too bad.

Prestone says:
March 25, 2009 at 2:14 pm

Another good vendor for DVI to HDMI stuff is Sewell – pretty good prices, but more known for their tech support:


Will says:
March 25, 2009 at 3:34 pm

When I buy alkalines, which is rare because I prefer rechargeables, I buy the store brand. I've never seen any huge advantage to the name brands.

DensityDuck says:
March 25, 2009 at 4:31 pm

Will: I bet you're the kind of person who buys “Toasted O's”, “Fruity Rings”, “Wheat Flakes”, and “Cruchy Squares” cereal.

Letibeme says:
March 25, 2009 at 4:58 pm

I prefer Plankton's verse:

“F is for fire that burns down the whole town
U's for uraniuuum — BOMBS
N is for no survivors …”
js says:
March 26, 2009 at 9:40 am

So what DS game did she get?

My daughter's been playing Pikmin. Last night she dreamed that she was a blue one.

Will says:
March 26, 2009 at 11:32 am

DensityDuck: True, but I do have some brand loyalties. Dr Pepper stands alone. No Mr. Piibb or Dr. Thunder or whatever knock-off brand can come close.

James says:
March 26, 2009 at 11:57 am

Second the monprice recommendation, except for one thing: buy yourself a bundle of cables at once to save on shipping. I got a DVI-DVI, one DVI-HDMI, a few HDMI-HDMI, and one each male and female DVI-HDMI adapter widgets. I now have a toolkit that will let me hook up any combination of the two for the forseeable future, shipped cost about 25 bucks. They should sell a kit, but it's easy/cheap to make your own.

DensityDuck says:
March 26, 2009 at 3:05 pm

James: Ho, ho, ho. Wait until they come out with XIC.
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?
Late night TV: caught some “Moral Orel,” an old offering from the Cartoon Network. I can imagine the pitch: “It’s just like that Davey and Goliath stop-motion Jesus-freak cartoon no one saw but we all remember from a Simpsons parody, except its about Islam! Dad’s a flaming imam, and the kid’s a wanna-be suicide bomber, sort of like how Bobby Hill wants to be a prop-comic. They see every aspect of life through the narrowest of theological prisms, and every show ends with the hint of pedophilia.”

Execs shift in their seats, stare into their coffee -

“Oh, just kidding, it’s about Christians.”

It’s a fascinating show, because it has little to do with actual Christianity. It’s all about what some people need Christianity to be so they can feel superior to its practitioners. I doubt Christians would be offended, any more than an American would be offended by a Soviet cartoon that shows Mickey Mouse in a top hat arranging a lynching in Times Square. Whatever, friend.

Hah: just checked the wiki.

Rod Putty is the minister for the local church and wears a very obvious toupee. He is a very lonely and bitter individual who is held in both high esteem and disdain by the citizens (case in point: his house is egged on Halloween). His disdain for God often finds its way into his sermons, and
he has a coffee cup in his office stating “I hate my boss,” though sometimes it says “…and then you die.” His resentment stems from being a prematurely balding virgin. Putty has also displayed some racist tendencies.

Ohhhkaladokalee, then.

Worked at home all day, wrote a ton, scanned much – although I have to keep reminding myself, scanning is not working. Scanning is gathering the materials for working. If they remade Metropolis they wouldn’t have a sweaty damned prole lashed to the settings panels of the scanner, desperately adjusting them as the program demanded.

If you’ve seen Metropolis – and I recommend only the recent version, which will soon be replaced by another version with more lost footage, until someday the entire movie, all six non-stop years of it, will be released in the form of 30 TB hard-drives, complete with director commentary (he’s dead, but they laid a mike on his tomb and recorded ambient noise for two hours) and an alternate ending version where the Robot Girl runs away with Rosie the Maid. Well, it was the Weimar era.

There will be more today, but not for now. Busy and behind. One of the reasons I redid the Bleat as a blog, incidentally, was to give me more freedom, save me from turning out a giant block of copy at night when I had other things to do. Today I spent a lot of time on the novel, and it’s going to be that way for a while. If you just pop in once a day, there are things below you may have missed. For that matter, let’s have an open thread on a subject broached below in the Teeth & Gams entry. Here’s an ad I got from the paper. Guess the date.
It's from 1939, which is why I copied it off. She looks quite un-thirties. Granted, she's emerging from the shower, and hence has the unstudied hair so favored by later generations, but it's rather fetching. Perhaps it's me. Standards of beauty change, though – the heroine of Metropolis seems plain by current glamour standards:

At the same time, though, in the same country, they had the startlingly modern Louise Brooks, who I suspect would be catnip in any era:
I can't think of anyone from the silent era who seems so alive, even over the distance of eight decades. (Yes, that's a menorah behind Miss Brooks. It's from “Pandora's Box.” She's a woman of loose morals, and perhaps the menorah is intended to tell us why. Oh those crrrazy Germans.)

So: name someone considered Smokin’ in the past whose appeal seems mysterious today. Or, if you like, someone whose appeal is undiminished. No need to confine this to female pulchritude.

**One more thing:** Lance Lawson Thursday over at buzz.mn. See you ASAP.
160 RESPONSES TO *thursday, march 26*

**Singe** says:
March 28, 2009 at 4:04 pm

Ada Lovelace

**MissPiggy's Ugly Sister** says:
March 29, 2009 at 10:50 pm

Only one mention of Sophia Loren? Look at her in *Grumpier Old Men* in the bar in the red dress and then realize she is 60 years old in that movie. I never looked that good in my twenties. However, I prefer to look at guys, so my votes are for Christopher Judge (SG1) and for Sean Connery (young and old) and Adrian Paul as Duncan McLeod (sigh...).

**ChristaC** says:
March 29, 2009 at 11:03 pm

I am glad to see so many people appreciate Christopher Plummer. I always wanted to see him cast as a leading man more than he was.

Also, I cannot believe there is someone else in this world who saw and loved Henry Wilcoxon as Richard the Lionhearted in “The Crusades!”

Cary Grant, Sean Connery (older version), Errol Flynn are also on my list.

**curtsnide** says:
March 30, 2009 at 3:44 pm

From my time going to movies at the Campus and The Uptown, Laura Antonelli and Sonia Braga. From a long time ago, and a Disney movie about chimps, Yvette Mimieux (sp?)

Rita Hayworth is the best part of the very good Shawshank Redemption.

**Gi** says:
March 30, 2009 at 9:48 pm

Always late to the party...has anyone mentioned Robert Mitchum? He still carried that air of danger into his golden years...Also Howard Keel (I know, I know...) I seem to have a preference for men who resemble slabs of meat. Never understood Kirk Douglas – his eyes! his cheekbones! his dimple! -blech – like an all-icing cake, it's too damn much. As far as the ladies, think Claudette Colbert might transfer to “modern times” – just give her some plastic barettes, cat eye glasses and she could be the clerk at Starbucks.

**sam** says:
March 31, 2009 at 7:03 am

I just discovered Margaret Sullavan in “The Good Fairy,” and googled her out of curiosity. Henry Fonda's first wife. Suicide (tho could've been accidental overdose) at the age of 49. Anyhow, she was absolutely adorable and very sexy in the movie.
curtsnide says:  
March 31, 2009 at 12:31 pm

Kitty Carlisle is a revelation in Night at the Opera. Stunning in a very elegant way.

Tiffany Z. says:  
March 31, 2009 at 12:43 pm

I read a HUGE book about Louise Brooks. I didn't know who she was but I love HUGE books from the library. She was quite beautiful. I need to find some of her silents and actually watch a pic of hers, though.

Speaking of HUGE books, Dilbert 2.0 is too huge a book. Nearly broke my back lugging that baby home.

bigmissfrenchie says:  
March 31, 2009 at 5:39 pm

I would just like to say that I love you all for even knowing who these people are. My days at work are spent with 20-somethings (and 30-somethings) who say brilliant things like “I don't like black and white movies”. It breaks my heart! So to hear a discussion that mentions everyone from Theda Bara to Katharine Ross does my soul good.

Ross says:  
April 2, 2009 at 12:46 am

bigmissfrenchie:  
Glad to oblige!(I suspect that's why many of love this site, as well.)

← Older Comments
Phone rings: I didn’t get to it in time. There’s a message. It's my Dad.

Well, I just called to say the water’s rising, and the flood will probably carry us away, so I just wanted to say goodbye. (pause) (long and dramatic:) Good bye.

Hit redial. I thought he was joking, because he's a mile from the river. The house he bought after leaving the Ancestral Home isn’t on a flood plain; it's between the Red and the Cheyenne.
The latter river was the one that occupied my imagination as a child more than the Red; it wound around my grandparent’s farm, flooded from time to time, and was much more of a presence than the Red. We only encountered the Red when we crossed over into Moorhead, and like most natural objects that don’t give you any trouble, you define it by its most complaint state. The Cheyenne I first encountered as a kid, going through the woods with my cousins, past the old rusted tractor Grandpa drove into the woods long ago and left for the vines to obscure. The river seemed big and deep and dangerous – must have been eight, nine. The banks were like the Grand Canyon. When it flooded in ’69 we went out one night to sandbag, or so I seem to think; I have a memory of rushing water, tension, haste, trouble.

So dad was kidding. Still, I wanted to know how it was going.

“We’re bringing everything up from the basement tomorrow,” he said.

What? Yes: the creek near his house is expected to swell and leave its banks and spread throughout the development. It’s part natural crick, part diversion (“Diversion #27,” he called it) – runs straight north-sound along the freeway, then rambles without care through the neighborhoods before snapping to attention and heading straight west along I-94. It was designed to keep the houses dry. Most years, it does. This isn’t one of those years.

The area around the station is expected to flood. The farm is expected to flood.

Since these events now require Federal benediction, I wonder if the President will visit. It would be wise of him to consider it.

**Great day, all that aside:** dropped Natalie off at the bus stop after a hasty morning. I dropped the first Pop-Tart. Yes, I made her a Pop-Tart. It’s Daddy-Daughter Week, and all the rules are broken. Except for 98.7% of them. Plus, they were Fiber One Pop-Tarts, which contain as much Fiber as a cargo container from the IKEA factory. The dog got the first one, even though it was flaming hot. Didn’t stop him from eating it. Dogs are a constant lesson in the perils of Appetite. Yum OUCH Yum OUCH Yum BURNS Yum OUCH.

Downtown to shoot the NewsBreak, which is now humming along much better than before. I’m doing the happy-clappy section, weather / sports / brite, and it’s great fun.

Why don’t you watch it here? Thank you.

Bade farewell to the co-workers off to cover the flood, then went to write a column. Did so at home, where I can walk around and talk and have a soda without paying $1.25, or ruining the carpet. Seriously: I think I’ve cost the company hundreds of dollars in carpet shampooing costs over 11 years, but I’m not entirely to blame. The soda-delivery systems dump a big tubular bladder of pop down the chute, angering up its effervescence, and when you twist the top the pop spumes out with adolescent enthusiasm. I suppose I could take it back to my desk and let it simmer down there, but I never think of that. It took five years to remind myself to open it over a garbage can.
It's also nice to be home with the dog, who more or less ignores me, except when the sound of the back door penetrates his deafness. *You going out for a cigar? Mind if I come?* Then he goes outside, assumes the noble nose-to-the-wind posture, sniffs for news, then wanders around sniffing the spots he's despoiled like an elderly roue recollecting tales for his autobiography.

I usually finish by three, and then it's time for the bus. She got off the bus wearing a wan unhappy expression: tummy ache. Since she's almost nine, she said stomach ache, but the parent hears, and says, tummy ache, because somehow that brings up old comforting Pooh-era ideas. She didn't want any hot chocolate, which certainly meant something was askew. Turns out it was hunger. She'd been too hungry for lunch. The same rote items did not appeal. “And my cheese stick fell on the floor and kid stepped on it.” Around five she was ravenous, and since this is Daddy-Daughter Week, she had a peanut-butter sandwich for supper, and I had a bowl of chili. Living like savages. Once again, I chose the chili that expired in 2011 instead of the one that expired in 2010, because the former had a pull-ring top, and I simply could not be arsed to use a can opener for my meal. Paaa-thetic. But delicious!

Come to think of it, I had three hot-sauce-based meals today. A sausage patty studded with dollops of Rooster Sauce for breakfast – along with a serving of Fiber One Bowl Scouring Chore Boy Bran; chicken brushed with Frank's Red Hot Buffalo Wing sauce for lunch; chili for supper. If you're wondering where Tabasco fits into this, it doesn't. I am done with Tabasco, unless I'm dealing with lackluster eggs. Tabasco is as subtle as flossing with a horseshoe.

**Later today:** 100 Mysteries! An actual legit movie, with real stars. It's very good, so the recap will probably be rather small. New column at startribune.com as well. Enjoy!
As we all know (CNN reporters notwithstanding) dikes and levees have to be maintained. And freaks of nature happen. If the dunes at Redondo Beach are breached, I'm pretty sure I'll have beachfront property. And I live on Sunset Boulevard. Okay, slight exaggeration, but still. And again, all the best to the Lileks family.

swschrad says:
March 27, 2009 at 7:13 pm

if the dunes breach at redondo beach, you will be inundated with freaks of nature, no doubt about it. dude.

there are, and will continue to be, red alerts for sandbaggers here and voluntary (for now) evacuations there. that's going to be life in F-M for a week or so.

HarrisonS says:
March 27, 2009 at 7:14 pm

In response to Nancy--

I wouldn't have tabasco or pete unless it was a choice between hotsauce and no hotsauce! Bud Heavy has some redeeming qualities, namely that it does in fact taste like beer instead of beer-water.

RR Ryan says:
March 27, 2009 at 7:40 pm

The freaks are already here. They're called my neighbors. As someone said a long time ago: all the fruits and nuts tumble down Route 66 and land in California. And again, all the best to Lileks pere. If I could be there installing sandbags, I would. Growing up in Florida prepares one for such things.

Robert says:
March 27, 2009 at 9:45 pm

Good luck to your father, and everyone else in harm's way. Speaking as a resident of New Orleans, it's no fun cleaning up after a flood. Hopefully the water in Fargo won't stay around for quite as long.

Nancy says:
March 27, 2009 at 10:02 pm

To HarrisonS,
No Bud for me I am A Victory Pils (Downington, PA) girl these days. No mainstream beer approaches the crisp flavor and bite of a Czech-style Pilsner…

MaryIndiana says:
March 28, 2009 at 1:00 am

I have been thinking about your Dad and everyone else in Fargo all day/eye. I hope you will keep us updated through the weekend.
Zipity says:
March 28, 2009 at 12:38 pm

My brother-in-law is holed up in the Oakport Township area of Moorhead, MN (one of the hardest hit areas in this flood). So far, so good. His wife took the cats and left for higher ground on Wednesday (I think, the days have congealed into an unrecognizable clump). He just replaced the keg in his kegerator on Wednesday, and is cautiously optimistic. But the river always has the last word....

GardenStater says:
March 28, 2009 at 10:49 pm

Latest news reports tell me that Fargo/Moorhead may be spared. Good news, indeed.

Claire says:
March 29, 2009 at 9:07 pm

I like the suit and tie very much.

Fred says:
March 30, 2009 at 11:55 am

I can’t “watch it here” because all it does is show up as a blank screen with absolutely no guidance as to what type of flash or java or ???? is needed to make it play. I suspect the problem is on my end but am clueless as to how to proceed to fix it.

I used to be able to watch the Jimmy “Jim” Lileks show program without any difficulties, so I really wish I knew what has changed...

Guess I’ll have to see if it plays on the wife’s Windows system.
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?
The week began with disappointing radio all the way to work. I switch between the 80s channel and “1st Wave,” the oldies channel for the skinny-tie set, and it was tripe and bloat-pop all the way. Every morning it’s the Psychedelic Furs. The guy sounds like a mortician on karaoke night. There was also some Banarama, in case you wanted to begin your day with three women who couldn’t sing and were mixed so far back in the song they might as well have performing in the parking lot. Sometimes I wonder if they got the job on their looks, but you hate to be cynical about these things.

Parked, plugged the meter, upstairs to work. I’ve stopped wearing Full Suit for the TV days; it’s jacket, tie, jeans and Chuck Taylors. Oh, you can’t see the shoes, but the powerful hipster implications shine through, I’m sure.

I’ve had raw nerves all day. Either they gave me a headache, or the headache gave me raw nerves, or the two just held hands and danced a merry gavotte all day on the ground that will someday be my grave, but I’ve just been feeling mean. The only pleasure I got out of the day was a brief, desperate spasm of novel-writing before I went to get Natalie from school. Maybe that’s part of it: school. In a brilliant effort to lose the support of the people whose grossly inflated property taxes help pay for the local educational system, the schools are mulling a plan to move things around, maybe. Hard to say. No one seems to have any specifics, which makes everyone wonder one of two things:
1. They know what they’re doing, and are keeping it from us because they know we’ll go nuts when they tell us what’s what

2. They don’t know what they’re doing, yet, and are going through the motions of “public input” so it looks better when they do what they want to do anyway

The issue is money, we were told – not enough jack for the buses. Then something else was added to the mix: since we have neighborhood schools, the schools tend to reflect the neighborhood, and hence the “diversity” issues come into play. (Natalie gets off the bus with a girl from Italy and one of her best friends is a girl from Russia, but this doesn’t count.) The only way to address the issue is busing in some kids and making others leave their schools and go elsewhere – for their last year of elementary school.

You can imagine the disruption this would cause the children – some kids go to this school, others go to that one, the bonds built up over five years unravelled, with one year in a new school before they’re moved to the middle school. But the district’s website displays different priorities. One option wants “32% – 35 % of students to change school.” Love that scientific precision. This would mean that the “percent of schools with 30 – 70% of students of color to change from 29 – 40%.”

So, theoretically, this could be done to change the composition of a school from 30%, which is unacceptable, to 29%, which is okay. This goal trumps any problems the kids may have, but that’s not a factor. If this goes through, we’re out – which would be fine with them. They get to keep the money, after all. I just want someone to tell me my daughter has to leave the school she knows and loves because she’s the wrong color, and I want them to tell it to her, too.

Everyone around here – well, those of us who gather at the bus stop to see the kids off, and stand there to pick them up – is a great supporter of the public schools, and we love the school our children attend. Everyone is feeling like a sucker.

Why, it’s enough to drive a man to drink. If you were drinking in 1935, what sort of hooch might you choose? I ran off a couple of ads from the microfiche today. Brands were different then. Bottoms Up! Formerly aged 12 months, now aged a minimum of 15 months, so you’ll only go blind in one eye.
Then there's Old Drum:

HOST WITH THE MOST
That's W. Ernest Townley, of 3162 Belvedere Boulevard, Omaha NB. So amazing is the modern world that I find myself angry when I cannot immediately call up a street-level view of the house that belonged to a man in a 1935 liquor ad, but must content myself with the view from space:

Here's the ad copy. They made all of this up.

It's “Drinkable!” Among the annals of advertising come-ons, that's right up there with “digestible.”

The other day I mentioned I was playing around with the MacHeist bundle, and there were requests in comments (okay, one) to know what I was doing with the nifty apps. Well, I'm using LittleSnapper for screen grabs, but may stop if I can't figure out a way to keep it from dumping everything grab on the desktop. Using Acorn for quick image manipulation on the Air, which is my office computer; using Picturesque for quick effects that are already
cliques, but may still be useful. One such example may be found in this week's “Black and White World,” now moved to its very own site. It'll be up around . . . oh, noonish. Comic cover up at 10 AM after I finish NewsBreak; buzz.mn is already up with the small-town website of the week.

See you there! And here.

66 RESPONSES TO tuesday, march 31

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 31, 2009 at 1:50 pm

And what is really curious is the way Asians and East Indians are not really counted as minorities by those promoting diversity. This very noticeable here in Northern California.

juanito - John Davey says:
March 31, 2009 at 2:09 pm

Kimberly Reeves Says:
March 31st, 2009 at 10:45 am

Where in CA did you go to school? I had the same thing in the 70s when the elementary school 7 blocks from my house was declared unsafe for earthquakes. Ended up being bused for 1 hour for a 1 mile ride to another school that was forced enrollment for diversity. All the kids were fine, but the stress of kids enduring 2 hours of bus rides a day was too much. My parents pulled us out after 1 year and put us in the new “Basic” School program. “Basic” being a ton of homework and actual requirements to graduate. It was a sacrifice for my parents, since it did entail a 20 minute ride to school one way. But worth it.

The school they closed as being unsafe in earthquakes? Now a city of Sacramento Community Recreation center. Back in 94 we held a grand college graduation party for my wife in the old school auditorium (on whose stage I had previously performed some Christmas Musical classics).

The School I was bused to? Is two blocks from my Mom's current home, and is now a “Basic” School.

My Younger brother, who hated the bus rides? Certified bus mechanic for the Elk Grove School District.

roger h (bgbear) – where are you in Northern California? I'm in El Dorado Hills / Sacramento area.

roger h (bgbear) says:
March 31, 2009 at 2:49 pm

Monterey Bay area and I work on the SF Bay Peninsula.

I am from the rural central coast of California.
juanito - John Davey says:
March 31, 2009 at 3:00 pm

roger h (bgbear) Says:
March 31st, 2009 at 2:49 pm

Monterey Bay area and I work on the SF Bay Peninsula.

I am from the rural central coast of California.

We love Monterey. Used go there several times a year. Made a rather lazy route to Avila Beach in the summer of 2007 just so we could stop for lunch in Monterey. Only added 3 hours to the drive.

That Commute must be a pain though…

Mike Gebert says:
March 31, 2009 at 4:12 pm

I would love Monterey if someone with a submarine and some missiles wiped out all the touristy junk. Great aquarium though.

RabelRabel says:
March 31, 2009 at 5:00 pm

No offense, James, but for anyone from the home state of Eugene McCarthy and Fritz “Mr. Busing” Mondale to complain about forced busing is a bit rich. The best interests of your wonderful (no sarcasm intended) child have to be sacrificed to remedy the generations of racial injustice which created the current plight of Black Americans. That you and your family played no part in that is insignificant in the greater scheme of things. At least that's what I was told when my local school was destroyed way back when.

Pat In Colorado says:
March 31, 2009 at 6:36 pm

The sadder Budweiser girl for me!

RBPoBoy says:
March 31, 2009 at 7:33 pm

Oh no! My child might have to play with poor children who look different. I'm definitely yanking her from that situation.

Pathetic.

Patrick says:
March 31, 2009 at 8:09 pm

Speaking of outrage in government indoctrination centers, a principal at an elementary school here in Georgia has resigned after receiving a lot of heat over making a child shock himself with a pen that emits no more of a shock than what you receive when you walk across the carpet into the kitchen and then open the fridge door to get a snack.

The school board planned to fire her, but she decided to resign. She will continue serving out the rest of the year under the supervision of a board member.

I don't think we have the entire story here. I think what happened is
the child brought the pen to school to pick on a few classmates, and
enough of them complained to the teacher and principal that he was
sent to the principal's office, and she made him shock himself. For
once we have a principal who still uses "old school" methods.

Nancy says:
March 31, 2009 at 9:21 pm

“Artificially created diversity... doesn't cure the root problems of
low achieving minority students and penalizes non-minority
students. It's a lose/lose idea.”

Hey--it penalizes high achievers of every color and gender when a
school must shift more resources to remediation and discipline.

Dan Palmer says:
March 31, 2009 at 11:59 pm

RBPoBoy,

How about, oh no my kids are going to be bused to a school half an
hour away instead of the one 2 blocks from me, the school that is
one of the reasons I spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to
purchase my home here.

Instead I have to put up with some asshat trying to satisfy his/her
personal sense of what is an appropriate level of diversity rather
than being focused on, i don't know, making sure that kids can read
and write.

Your response, which doesn't appear to be satirical, is typical of
whinorities and their enablers. The only POSSIBLE reason that
someone might prefer one school over another is they're afraid of
the scary black/brown people that their children might be exposed
to.

I'm sure that is true for some parents, but I suspect that for most,
like the millions who just voted for a black president, don't give a
crap about the racial makeup. What they want is to send their kids
to the school they choose and not have some crusading idiot
override them for no definable benefit.

Dan Palmer says:
April 1, 2009 at 12:02 am

Nancy, You are correct. It is not just non-minority students who are
negatively affected by these outdated policies. Good catch.

Ross says:
April 1, 2009 at 2:53 am

Idiotic busing and redistricting in the '70s led to a full-blown riot at
my high school my senior year(it even made foreign papers, as far
away as Tokyo). Our district had been growing faster than any other
in the county, so the school was already at capacity, then they
bussed kids in and on top of that they decided to switch from 10-
12th grade to 9-12, bussing even more kids in, with no orientation or
transition. All it took was a few thugs(who, it turned out, didn't even
go to my school, just drove up for some felony fun) and the local
media vultures to spark off all that tension(I watched one little
group, who might or might not have been talking trash to a lone kid,
turn, see the TV camera crew closing on them, & suddenly grab the
kid, spreadeagle him on the hood of car & beat the hell out of him--of course, the “reporters” made no move to intervene or even get help). All these brilliant decisions did, ultimately, was cause simmering mistrust, violence and even more families to move out of town.

Richard Durbin says:
April 1, 2009 at 9:31 am

Ah, Chuck Taylors! I loved those shoes, but I haven’t been able to find them in my size in decades.

Doubting Thomas says:
April 1, 2009 at 11:42 pm

RBPoBoy: “Pathetic"

Yes, you are…

Margaret says:
April 2, 2009 at 7:09 am

RBPoBoy, I live in a neighborhood with “scary minorities“ and lots of them seem to bus their kids out of the district too, to charter and private schools judging from the number of buses that come through here. I think they see the local public schools as much of a titanic as white folks do.

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