Opportunity: the Pixar-movie UP promotional team is coming to Mpls on Monday, and I will be getting into a chair with many balloons attached, and go up in the air. Maybe even 4 feet. Problem: Child doesn't have school that day. Solution: she's coming with.

This will kick off season two of the Jimmy “Jim” Lileks show, BTW. I know I've mentioned this before, but I'm having more sheer fun in my job than ever. In my life. The whole bankruptcy-pay-cut-furlough thing aside, there's more opportunity to do things. Anything. I mean, today I did the NewsBreak, did another video interview on la grippe porcine, wrote a column, and Monday I get in a floating chair. Lucky & grateful.

The last two days have been coast-to-coast with work, somehow, and I end up at 11:30 with nothing on TV to watch for relaxation. Most of the movies I record are old TCM films, but I only record them for the opening credits. I love opening credits. Last night I caught a little “Bye, Bye Birdie,” which I'd never seen and never wanted to see, but then again I didn’t know it had Ann-Margrock. I has Dick Van Dyke, who's one of those guys I never want to see in a movie. No reason, but you know there won't be a fat funny guy or a glowering bald foil in black glasses or a gorgeous wife in capris, so what's the point? Right: no possibility of that wretched child actor, Richie. There's that. Also no possibility of the creepy neighbors. You knew that Jerry spent five years working up the nerve to suggest a wife-swap with Dick. C'mon, Rob, Life mag did a story on it.
I changed the channel, and there was a boxing match on. Now get this: the guy who was winning was expected to win, but was coming up against unexpected resistance from a guy who had heart, and surely deserved our respect and amazement for the punishment he was taking. He was a veteran of many fights who no doubt drew on years of experience, but in the end he was no match for the other fellow's speed and skill. All the judges scored it 89-88, 89-88, 89-87. It was every fight I've ever seen that was worth watching, in other words, but then I saw a freakish thing: Jack Nicholson in a canary yellow sport coat and Ray-Bans a few rows back, flashing the big Jack smile; he looked young. Then the crawl said the fight took place in 1983.

Interesting: in '83 you could pick out '57 right away. But I saw a COPS the other night set in 1997, and most of the characters looked as if they could have passed today. 1970 and 1960 were far, far apart in their look; 2010 and 2000, not so much. Only the middle 80s, with their Vice-inspired looks and TV versions of “punks” – always the spiky hair, the extreme eye-shadow – seem firmly seated in their era. Everything else has begun to float.

Music on the way to work today: DEVO. To be exact, “Working in the Coal Mine.” First song they did I liked – for a while I resented them, in the curious way you harbor actual grudges against groups when you’re young, because A) they didn’t seem to play ball with the rest of the terribly important New Wave movement, and B) that damned version of “Satisfaction,” which played constantly on the Valli jukebox, behind “No Woman No Cry,” “Refugee,” “The Thrill is Gone,” and “Satisfaction.” (Note: never tired of the real Stones version.) “Working” was amusing, and we all sang along: Lord! I am So Tired. How LONG can this go on? Also, C) DEVO served a strange purpose: it was punk for frat boys. It was the tune they played to show they were hip with the underground scene.

Clever little tune that it is, “Working in a Coal Mine” was music for a generation that would never have to do so, and hence could have a larf at the very idea. Coal? Do we use that anymore?

Went to a marvelous event Thursday night. As Zippy once said:
Maybe not all life, but certainly Thursday. We went to the annual Freedom Club dinner – it was Mark Steyn last time, and Amity Shlaes this go-round. They do the National Anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance, the surf-and-turf of American patriotic rituals. Love it. Damn straight it’s hand-on-heart time. They also did actual surf and turf, and I am logy with both. Had the pleasure of introducing my wife to Sen. Coleman, and they chatted about their stints in the AG’s office. There was more, but I know I sound too pleased with myself as it is, so I’ll spare you the name dropping. (Which is even worse, b/c of the obvious false modesty. Sorry.)

Ms. Shlaes was a delight to hear, but different than Steyn; he gave a rousing solid speech delivered with the customary acidic theatrical style; Shlaes seemed to extemporize outside of some bare-bones points, and hence would toss in details and anecdotes and quotes from the box marked “Wendell Wilkie,” since that was the theme. (Yes, Wilkie.) It was all quick and fresh and fascinating. “The Forgotten Man” is an indispensable account of the Great Depression – I’ve heard her talk about the subject on radio many times, and never heard the same stuff twice.

Waaay behind on the site work, but A) it’s not a job, and B) there’s always tomorrow. I cannot let my 100 mysteries schedule slip, or madness will follow. It’s daunting enough to know it’s a 2-year project, for heaven’s sake. I think there’s a sci-fi version of the boxed set as well.

So: maybe Curious Lucre today – it’s written, just not slapped together – and 100 Mysteries before midnight. Okay, maybe Saturday. In the meantime, here’s Friday’s column. Enjoy! See you around.
81 RESPONSES TO friday, may 1st

huddydrvr says:
May 1, 2009 at 7:03 pm

@crossdotcurve: What I’m proud of is that we have gone for nearly 8 years without a terrorist attack on our homeland. Let’s see if that record holds before we start throwing mudballs at people who somehow manage to take pride in their country, despite all its faults (that I’m sure you’ll be happy to enumerate).

Where do these people come from?

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crossdotcurve says:
May 1, 2009 at 7:07 pm

Indeed huddy,

Where do these torture apologists come from?

It’s bizarre.

The ends justify the means, I guess. Huh, Freedom Club Relativists.

Go figure…

Pathetic.

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cnyguy says:
May 1, 2009 at 7:37 pm

I was 6 years old when the “Dick VanDyke Show” came on the air, and I loved it so much that I used to tell people that I wanted to be Rob Petrie when I grew up. I never quite made it, I’m sad to say, but “DVD” remains one of my all-time favorites.

It would have been a taboo subject on TV in the early 60’s, especially for a “family” show, but I can imagine that the “DVD” writers could have come up with some funny stuff about wife-swapping in New Rochelle. Somehow, I doubt if Rob would have willingly traded Laura for Millie Helper though.

Way back up there in an earlier comment, Baby M suggested that Rob should have driven an Avanti. That would have been a good fit, come to think of it. Actually– and don’t ask me how or why I remember this– in an early episode, Rob drove a ’57 Dodge, and in a later one, he had a ’65 Mustang. Another episode revolves around Rob’s purchase of a flashy (fictional) sports car; seems to me it was called a Tarantula.

Wow! I sure must have spent too much time watching TV when I was a kid, if I can remember all that stuff. Maybe I just need to get out more often…

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hpoulter says:
May 2, 2009 at 5:18 am

There was also the episode where Laura is keeping a secret bank
account. Rob actually thinks she is being unfaithful, but it turns out she is putting money in the account so Rob can buy a sports car some day. The other day I heard the exact same plot on one of George and Gracie's old radio shows.

**Cory says:**
May 2, 2009 at 9:09 am

Great things about Bye Bye Birdie:
1. Ann-Margret
2. Paul Lynde's performance as a harried dad. Paul Lynde is so good acting tongue in his cheek – “I don’t want your respect.” That's what made him so good in Bewitched and Hollywood Squares.
3. The way they reference Ed Sullivan as an icon. Spot on. Think about it, less than three years later he changed the world's cultural landscape forever.
4. The Russians- still Cold War but not really threatening – with their cultural bent emphasized. A shoe banging.
6. Janet Leigh
7. Put on a Happy Face
9. Dance sequences

It was a short era but it was captured perfectly here. Interestingly, I watched the Dick Van Dyke pilot with Carl Reiner and what was striking was that Head of the Family was a typical 1950's show (pilot played in early 1960), his car, small house, small office, gray sidewalks of New York City, family/school looked like 1950's Eisenhower stuff. Dick Van Dyke Show was clear 1960's Kennedy. Capri pants, hairdos, stylish offices and house, modern kitchen. The Dick Van Dyke Show was only half way through it's run when Kennedy was assassinated but it's clearly a show of the brief era that proceeded it that was captured in Bye Bye Birdie.

**bgbear says:**
May 2, 2009 at 9:12 am

I am sorry for raining on someone's May Day parade. No hard feelings comrade?

That said, I believe “end justifying means” or “If You Want to Make an Omelet, You Must Be Willing to Break a Few Eggs” thinking comes from idealist movements and not the self defense thinking that motivated the last administration on “enhanced interrogation.”

If you want to argue that attempting to bring democracy to the middle east is idealist and a fool's errand, your criticism would be more on target. Wrong but, more thought out.

**huddydrvr says:**
May 2, 2009 at 10:48 am

bg & others, I apologize for responding to what was an obvious troll. In the midst of a nice discussion about Dick Van Dyke/MTM and riding a bunch of balloons... jeez.

Now if you want to relate “torture” to this discussion, you've got the wrong Van Dyke. You need to mention JERRY Van Dyke, and ... dare I say it... “My Mother the Car.” (I shudder at the thought).
Fortunately we still have a constitutional right to switch the channel.

bgbear says:
May 2, 2009 at 10:57 am

I know, I keep telling my self to ignore them and then there I go again and respond. I'll to restrain myself.

As annoying as Jerry van Dyke can be, he does have some charm and talent compared to many others on TV today. My Mother the Car definitely deserves some trashing but, I cannot say it was the all time worst show. Small Wonder comes to mind as a possible contender.

huddydrvr says:
May 2, 2009 at 11:23 am

Actually I think Jerry was kidnapped by the show's producers, held in an undisclosed location, and tortured into appearing in it.

Hmmm… worst early 60's show. Now THAT is a good topic…

huddydrvr says:
May 2, 2009 at 11:35 am

I just checked the Wikipedia entry for the 1961 TV lineup and have the following nomination, which I vaguely remember, on ABC Friday nites at 8:

“The Hathaways” is a 26-episode situation comedy which aired on ABC from October 6, 1961, to March 30, 1962, starring Peggy Cass (1924-1999) and Jack Weston (1924-1996) as suburban Los Angeles “parents” to a trio of performing chimpanzees.

bgbear says:
May 2, 2009 at 12:21 pm

There is a notorious one from 1968 called “The Ugliest Girl in Town” about a guy posing as a female hippie model.

Paul says:
May 2, 2009 at 2:57 pm

Jerry appeared in several DVD's as – appropriately – Rob's brother Stacy. He was quite funny, and in one episode he played almost two characters: the brother, a shy, stumbling guy, and his alter ego when he was sleepwalking who was loud and the life of the party. In another he fell in love with an equally stumbling, shy girl.

Then his mother came back as a 1928 Porter and he was relegated to the eighth circle of Hades.

Brian Lutz says:
May 2, 2009 at 4:23 pm

As far as bad early 60s shows go, how about You're in the Picture? It starred Jackie Gleason, but it was so bad it lasted just one episode, and the timeslot for the show the next week consisted entirely of Jackie Gleason sitting on an empty stage apologizing for the horrors he inflicted on the viewing public the previous week.
Charles says:
May 2, 2009 at 6:57 pm

“Sen. Coleman”? You mean the guy who lost in November, the SORE LOSER kicking and screaming? Yeah, I’m sure he’s a great asset for MN despite losing the election and parading himself at your smug dinner. Unbelievably pathetic behavior. The dude lost. Where’s the dignity?

How patriotic of you, dining with someone who’s actively subverting democracy, clinging to the chandelier shamefully, and depriving MN of its elected Senator. Which is Franken.

Lileks says:
May 2, 2009 at 8:04 pm

I use the term in the sense one refers to jimmy Carter as President Carter. Thank you for questioning my patriotism; please play again!

huddydrvr says:
May 2, 2009 at 9:19 pm

Looks like we have a troll using multiple IDs....

One might say that it's “pathetic” behavior. Please, go back to Kos or Huffington or whence you came; it's getting tiresome.

gottacook says:
May 2, 2009 at 9:34 pm

Unlike Presidents (or former presidents) Carter, Clinton, et al., people may not be certain whether Coleman remains, in some sense, a senator while the election remains unresolved – including some ostensible journalists. For example, about six weeks ago, WTOP news radio here in DC referred to him as the “incumbent”; he's not. Americans (patriotic or otherwise) deserve not to be confused about this fact.

For this reason, anyone referring to him since January 2nd as “Sen. Coleman” is, in essence, saying that he SHOULD be senator. James, it's your blog and you have a right to put forth your opinions, but did you really think you'd catch no flak over this?

(This is somewhat reminiscent of DC-area residents who refer to the airport across the river from downtown either as “National” or as “Reagan,” depending on how they stand politically; no one in either group would ever use the other group's terminology.)

gottacook says:
May 2, 2009 at 9:39 pm

No, I'm neither a troll nor using multiple names; I didn't write at all about Coleman’s or Franken’s conduct or merits. I just want facts to be respected and kept separate from opinions; anyone writing “Sen. Coleman” before the contest is resolved is, in effect, confusing a fact and an opinion.

Mike Gebert says:
May 2, 2009 at 9:48 pm

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=2053
“As far as bad early 60s shows go, how about You’re in the Picture? It starred Jackie Gleason, but it was so bad it lasted just one episode”

So there was another one-episode-only bomb back then... besides the legendary Turn On:

http://www.unclebarky.com/list_files/6be12c1fad088fc512bf2d54c9f2eb-30.html

Lileks says:
May 2, 2009 at 10:12 pm

For the record, gottacook is coming in from a different IP address, and has a different tone from the previous poster – the word “civil” come to mind – so no, I don’t think he’s a troll or using sock puppets.

gottacook said: “For this reason, anyone referring to him since January 2nd as ‘Sen. Coleman’ is, in essence, saying that he SHOULD be senator.” This Kaiser Family Foundation bio page here refers to Dave Durenberger as “Senator Durenberger,” and it was written after he’d vacated the office; I don’t assume they think he should still be in office. It’s a standard term of respect, as I understand it. How anyone wants to interpret the use is up to the reader, of course, but the post wasn’t intended to discuss the details of the issue.

In any case, thanks for stating the case succinctly & without flaming rancor. (The “Flaming Rancor” was a creature in a Star Wars novel I read many years ago, I think.)

Mike Gebert says:
May 2, 2009 at 11:09 pm

I thought Flaming Rancor was what Perez Hilton showed toward Miss California, personally.

Mrs. Peel says:
May 3, 2009 at 10:14 am

OT, but James, just wanted to let you know that the word in the COPS lyrics is actually “idren.” According to the captioning, anyway. I think it’s the Jamaican equivalent of “brothers” (in the colloquial sense).

(Not kidding; the captioning seriously says: Nobody naw give you no break
Police naw give you no break
Not even yo idren naw give you no break)

huddydvr says:
May 3, 2009 at 11:15 am

FYI: As a matter of courtesy (and as delineated in most style manuals) when addressing or referring to persons who have been elected or appointed to high office, one should use the title of their highest office, unless they hold current office. Thus Jimmy Carter will be addressed as “President Carter” for the rest of his life, unless he gets elected to another office, say senator, in which case he would be addressed as “Senator Carter” until he leaves office, and then addressed as “President Carter” thereafter. Similarly, Ambassadors are addressed as “Ambassador such-and-such”, Senators as “Senator such-and-such”, Mayors as “Mayor such-and-such”, etc.
So it's perfectly OK to refer to Norm Coleman as “Senator Coleman.” (Unless you prefer “Senator such-and-such”).

gottacook says:
May 3, 2009 at 1:20 pm

I don’t want to continue this fruitlessly, but: (1) Anyone can surely find a style manual that agrees with his or her preconceived notions about a given usage. While I don’t necessarily endorse its continued existence, the Associated Press (whose style guide is the standard for U.S. journalists) says to use “former” on first reference in such cases. (2) To restate my original point: Omitting “former” for a former holder of high office (e.g., saying simply “Senator” or “President” as a term of respect) is nothing to complain about when that person won’t be holding the office again, but it’s another thing in the case of Coleman because the contest process is unresolved (and because some uninformed people believe he’s the incumbent).

hpoulter says:
May 3, 2009 at 5:38 pm

Maybe you shouldn’t go around telling people what they mean by what they are saying. Why assume you know better than they what they mean by what they are saying, and then presume to instruct them on it? Let’s all assume good faith. Lileks didn’t mean anything subversive to the civil order by his courteous usage. If the very funny and brilliant Harvard grad and putative comedian Al Franken officially wins the seat and is certified, we will all call him Senator Franken (among other things).

BTW, thanks a lot, Minnesota – first Jesse and now this.

Nick says:
May 3, 2009 at 6:21 pm

I just googled “Freedom Club” for a few yuks and got back the following:

“Freedom Club: A 12-Step Recovery Clubhouse in Marietta, Georgia”
“Convert debt to cash. Mortgage, Credit Card, Student Loan, IRS, Auto debt, Debt free, equalization educational programs.”
“www.churchofeuthanasia.org”

I am guessing it is number twos?

Gina says:
May 3, 2009 at 6:22 pm

First of all — better thee than me, Mr. Lileks. I’m so scared of heights that even four feet in a floating chair is four feet too many.

Second of all — have my fellow country fans here seriously never heard of Carrie Underwood, Taylor Swift, Kellie Pickler, Julianne Hough, Ashton Shepherd, Heidi Newfield . . . ? Like ‘em or hate ‘em, female artists are flooding onto the scene right now. (I like some of their songs, am not so keen on others.) Country music may still be dominated by men, but every time I turn around it seems like there’s a new girl in town. As for some of the older female stars, interestingly, I like Shania but can’t stand Faith. Go figure. I think the difference is that Shania, weird as she can be sometimes, always
seems to really love what she's doing, whereas Faith comes across as too packaged to me. Plus, Shania actually has some fun songs. Most of Faith's are just plain drippy.

And that's probably more about country music than anyone wanted to hear.

Nick says:
May 3, 2009 at 6:38 pm

Oh yeah, “Working in a Coalmine” was originally an Allen Toussaint/Lee Dorsey song back in the mid-sixties. I'm sure those guys wouldn't know anything about back-breaking, underpaid labour though.

Continuing the theme, “Freedom of Choice” is an excellent Devo song and album.

gottacook says:
May 3, 2009 at 6:57 pm

I feel no compulsion to have the last word here – people can disagree without having an axe to grind. I was reading our host's columns 25 years ago in City Pages, I own his book of later columns Notes of a Nervous Man, and his posting of the Joe Loss Concertium’s “Music to Drive By” in the Bleat 4-5 years ago has enriched my life (and my family's) ever since. I don't necessarily agree with everything he writes, but so what? Must all comments express agreement?

Steven Knoerr says:
May 4, 2009 at 7:47 am

“She's coming with.” I always thought that was a Chicago regionalism, because no one I've ever met doesn't hear a Chicagoan say that and sit at the edge of the chair, waiting for whatever comes after “with.” And it appears to be in wider (but unfortunate) circulation! I had no idea.

Steven Knoerr says:
May 4, 2009 at 7:49 am

Good grief. I just stopped and realized, I was wondering about James's usage of “with,” but forgot that he's going into the air in a balloon chair. Yikes!
Spring. I’d say “at last” but April wasn’t hard. April wasn’t happy with us, and vice versa, but we got along. No snow. Last year I think I saw a few flakes on May First, which makes you want to go back in time, dig a trench around the state, and fill it with scorpions, so no one will ever settle here and you will be born somewhere else. But then where do you go when your time-travel trip is over? Back to the present, where you’re living in the same place, and everything else is identical, except that the scorpion is the official state insect, and people grill them on skewers with lemon butter in the summer.

Sunday I bought a hose reel to replace the old leaky plastic junkbox I’d had for a few years. Bought the same one. Again. No choice. No one has anything different. Yes, I know, hosereel.com probably has all sorts of options, but I can’t tell you how much I don’t want to spend time examining hose reels on line, then setting up an account so I can buy one. Many years ago American Express had a program attached to their Blue card – you had your own card reader, attached to your computer via a cable, and when you made a
purchase you just swiped your card. Magic! Perfect! Except it didn’t work for
the Mac. This was back in double-ought, though – aside from Amazon I’m not
sure what I bought online back then. I don’t think anyone bought anything
aside from books and CDs. Hence the crash. Hence the guys sitting around an
empty office looking at the fancy furniture, thinking: bankvaults.com would
have worked, if we just hadn’t offered free shipping.

Anyway. I bought the hosereel, took it home, hooked up the hose. Didn’t buy
the “kink-free” kind, which suggests that other varieties make you wear
thigh-high leather boots when you use them, because they were damned
expensive. Didn’t buy the cheapest kind, either. No one does. Everyone buys
the middle-priced unit. By putting out something cheap and something
expensive, they can raise the price of the middle-priced unit five bucks.
You’re asking: what did you pay? No, no. Talk savvy. The question is “What’s
the price point?” At some point we all started saying “price point” because it
sounds so insider-y, like we’re in the business, somehow.

I now regret not spending more for the kink-free hose, because the hose, once
unfurled, instantly did an impersonation of a snake with bad gas, and twisted
itself in a dozen spots. Once it accomplished this, the previously pliant hose
became hard as cold jute, and had to be massaged back into tubular shape.
But I didn’t mind, he said, lying, because the end result was the lovely sight of
the evening sun lighting up the droplets of the sprinkler as it swayed back
and forth, waving a fond hello to Spring.

This week: the gazebo, and the return of the Oak Island Water Feature.

**Saturday** I ran the usual errands, including a car wash that angered the gods
so much they immediately cast ran down from the heavens. On the way back
from the wash, driving along a miserable frontage road that intersects the
hopeful, 60s-era street “Computer Avenue,” I passed the ruins of an old
restaurant.
It was Stuart Anderson’s Cattle Company, then it wasn’t. They knocked it down, but the slab remained, and I’ve always wanted to see what was left. If you like urban archeology, this is all you’ll get in the burbs.

The entrance is intact. Once shrubs and lights welcomed your approach.

The floorplan is still intact, more or less.
They left the tile, which is a little like shooting someone in the gut and leaving them for dead. Didn't even respect the place enough to finish it off.

You can imagine more if you have your back to it; you can imagine walking out after a good meal, leaving behind the warm restaurant to run to your car in the middle of winter, or stepping outside on a spring evening.

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!
The chain changed its name to the Black Angus, which I recall as a name of a Fargo steakhouse – one of those places where you parents went on their anniversary, and you had to stay home with a babysitter, and the cloud of Aqua Net Mom put on still hadn’t dissipated by the time they got back.

**Entertainment** over the weekend: the weekly B&W movie was “Caged,” the original women-in-prison movie. Not campy, which was fine; I hate camp. Caught up lost, and AISOT, the three most confusing words in the English language are “previously, on Lost.” It’s always something I forgot that has terrible relevance to something else I forgot but which is terribly relevant to the next episode. Believe it or not, this isn’t a criticism – the first episode of this season aside, I love this show, and this season has been one 360-head-revolver after another. I hold to my prediction: in the last episode, everyone gets off the island, then the camera lingers on the beach, heads into the jungle, and zooms up for a wide shot of Tony Soprano in the grass.

Also started watching Star Trek 3 in preparation for the new Trek movie. Saw #1 a while ago – it took me years and the director’s cut, but I finally respect it. I’m not sure I love it, but I respect it. Saw #2 with my daughter a while ago, and she was in AWE – wants to see the new one, too. I don’t need to see #4 for a while, never need to see #5 again, love #6, have come to really dislike #7, adore #8 except for hippie-drunk Zephram, am bored by #9, and proudly declare my membership in the club of 27 people who don’t hate “Nemesis,” at all. Never liked the new Enterprise, though. It was the nacelles.

Hadn’t seen #3 in a while, and was surprised to see it was better than I remembered. It continues the stupid trend of starship captains who act like dweebs – really, when you compare them all (movies and TOS), they’re either unbalanced or vain weightless goofballs. The only one who seemed to fit the chair was Sulu, and I never figured out how he got that gig. No disrespect, but he’s the driver. The only one who seemed like Captain material was Will
Decker, and Kirk managed to get him off the stage nicely enough. Here, I’ll take the ship. You go get yourself converted to energy so you can join with the robot version of your bald celibate ex-girlfriend.

Still like the Excelsior class above all. Always thought it was unfair that it didn’t get its own show.

**Off** to the Metrodome tomorrow for the “UP” movie promo – looks like we’re spreading our video team all over town for other stories, so I may have to shoot this myself, with Natalie holding the camera. She’s bummed she can’t ride the balloon chair up in the air. I’m bummed I will. Stay tuned – full story tomorrow! See you here. Oh – Matchbook later in the day, and buzz.mn this morn, briefly. Have a grand day.

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**54 RESPONSES TO *Monday, May 04***

**H Blix** says:
May 4, 2009 at 9:37 pm

Here here on hoses! What’s up with them? Last night I picked up a 150′ garden hose. In the rain today I unrolled, or rather “unleashed” the hose – a middle-grade hose. It’s as though manufacturers imbue hoses with a kink constant that when exposed to the Earth’s coriolis effect activates a “kink catalyst” creating a heretofore unknown form of ionic bonding. Unreal. Now if we could only capture the full power of hose kinking and use it to fuel our cars. 😊

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**Ross** says:
May 5, 2009 at 3:03 am

roger h (hgbear) Says:
“When I was in college back in the dark ages, the food service was called SAGA and there was the usually bad food jokes that go along with institutional food. I only ate at the cafeterias a few times and I thought it was pretty good compared to most big kitchen fare…” You dodged a bullet, then. Those SAGA things were franchised & the one at my alma mater(’80-'84) was run by a sleazy, disagreeable fireplug of a man called Ratzow(I believe). The only two meals of the year that were any good were Parents Day & Thanksgiving–both meals the people paying the bills were invited to. My women friends would dig out the biggest handbag they owned & line ‘em w/plastic in order to snatch a couple days’ decent leftovers. Thank Wotan my theatre dept. had a green room with a kitchenette back then, so we could pool our pennies & make industrial-sized pots of fresh pasta & sauce. The students practically had to have a ’60-style sit-in/building take over just to get him to add a below-average salad bar. My freshman year the dinner serving line happened to be staffed by a bunch of pre-med types from my floor who had a running contest to parody the dish names, using what it did to you or what drug would likely be prescribed. My favorite entry was “turkey tetracycline”. Gad–I’m queasy just thinking about it.
juanito - John Davey says:
May 5, 2009 at 1:16 pm

JamesS Says:
May 4th, 2009 at 2:45 pm

No Finnegan in the new ST movie? Kirk's nemesis all through the Academy, burned into his being with enough force to be recreated in Theodore Sturgeon's brilliant "Shore Leave," yet left out of the prequel?

That may be strike three for me, the first two being Kirk driving around in the desert when he was supposedly born in raised in Iowa...

Uhmm.... Global Warming? I'd like to take a roadie and see the great Iowan desert someday.

Star Trek, by the Numbers. : The Sundries Shack says:
May 6, 2009 at 11:07 pm

[...] either Picard or Data if the DVD cover is to be believed, has a nemesis. Romulans were involved. James Lileks didn’t hate it, and he has a pretty good eye for the movies. Beyond that, I got [...]

— Older Comments
default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Sitting outside in the dusk, a word meant be spoken by women with low, throat voices. Hard to imagine Minnie Pearl saying it's dusk! in the same sense as Susanne Pleshette. Different meaning. The clouds are wandering in like technical advisors; the rainclouds come behind.

Perfect day. In the morning we went to the Metrodome to participate in the “Up” promotion:

You get in the chair, strap in, and they let out the ropes until you're bobbing at the top of the Dome. By you I mean exactly that, since I didn’t. I'm not fond of heights of that nature. Not that I didn’t trust them; the team was fully-certified in ballooning, and could probably get me down by shooting the balloons one at a time in the exact sequence required to make a safe landing. I just didn’t want to. Oh, I'll get in a ball and roll around for a Disney promotion, but this? Just didn’t want to.
“Chicken,” said my daughter. Well, it’s all relative. Some of the things I do would give others hives, but I’m used to them. Does that make you chicken? No. Did this make me chicken? Huh? Sure, probably.

As we were walking through the bland bowels of the Metrodome to the field, I reminded my child how lucky she was to experience things like this. You’re going to be on the field.

“I was before,” she reminded me. “With the Girl Scouts? And the place was full.”

Sigh. Well, you’re lucky to . . . Participate in a Pixar promotion, then. Since the paper was short one shooter this morn and had to send others out to cover actual news, I was on my own. Would have framed a few shots differently if I’d thought about it, but obviously, I didn’t. It’s here. Yes, I am quoting Susan Hayward when I shout “I want to live!” Something about being strapped in a chair brought it to mind.

The gazebo didn’t show up today. I’m so used to fast shipping I’m surprised when an object the size of a Tomahawk missile box doesn’t appear the day after I summoned it from the ether. My fear: the UPS guy will leave it at the foot of the stairs, which defeats the entire purpose of having it delivered. My Saturday project will be the construction of said gazebo, the cleaning of the Oak Island Water Feature, and the ceremonial igniting of the backyard low-voltage lights. It’s odd what you remember: when I put up the first gazebo I listened to some old radio shows on my iPod while cursing and sweating, and
one of them was “The Pit and the Pendulum.” I saw the move as a kid, and it scared me – that great swinging blade, moving ever closer. Who would build such a thing? How do you explain that to the workmen? I’m tired of the way they slice the meats at the deli counter. Figured I’d try it myself. Fine, sir, but there are rats down here and vermin galore -

Silence! And Vermin Galore is the brother of my evil female henchwoman. You will not speak his name again.

Sorry, sir.

It’s odd how you remember specific songs from specific locales, but I think this ability perishes as you age, and pop music ceases to have the same importance. Put on a few selected songs, and I’ll tell you exactly where I lived at the time I first heard it. Of course in your youth you move around. For a few years you're Jell-O on a trampoline. You have more places to remember, and everything's so terribly crucial. Now I’m reduced to recalling overheated Poe adaptations in my backyard. Not literally. Although that would be co – no, it wouldn’t be cool. Another long Castle Productions version of some Poe story, with people in big house acting moody for ninety minutes, alluding some horrible secret. It's my sister! She . . . snores! I cannot bear it! I shall go mad!

Then stabbing, and a wrought-iron candle-stick holder falls over, and everything burns. Never a fan of those 60s horror movies; they played on TV when I was a kid, and even then I wondered how many times they could bring back Frankenstein. He should have been very easy to kill, given that he was stitched together. One good punch, and he'd come apart like a broken vase that had been glued together.

Today: just a comics update later on, but there’s the much-beloved Small Town Website of the Week coming up at noon at buzz.mn. Later? Who can say. See you here, there, and of course on Twitter all day. Oh – there’s a good vs. bad coffee discussion planned for buzz.mn – by all means, join in.

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Pass it along, if you wish

48 RESPONSES TO tuesday, may 05

Mumblix Grumph says:
May 5, 2009 at 1:46 am

Good coffee.

There is no such thing as good coffee. Count me as the lone voice against that devil brew with that lures in with the enticing aroma and then cruelly laughs as you taste it's foul essence.

I live in Seattle, the home of Starbucks. Ground zero for Juan Valdez and his vile swill. There are independent java joints in every parking lot...I shy away and hiss like a vampire at the Pope's garage...
Sorry, I just don't like the stuff. Now, Diet Coke…that's a different story all together. Nectar of the Gods, baby!

JimsShip says:
May 5, 2009 at 2:24 am

I think you should have let Natalie take a ride in the chair! Maybe not to the ceiling, but at least a little ways up. It would have been a nice reward for her for all the fodder she's supplied to the site, as well as a memory she'd never forget. (Plus it would have covered the fact that you chickened out nicely)

Steve Ripley says:
May 5, 2009 at 3:00 am

Braaaaackk! Buk Buk Buk! Shoulda sent (G)nat up!

Ross says:
May 5, 2009 at 3:21 am

Have to agree about those '60s horror flicks. But then, I'm not exactly a fan of the genre. Perhaps the two facts are connected... Hmm. There were some exceptions, often when Hammer(or whoever) would take the trouble to try & get the period stuff right, since I was a history nerd from kindergarten on; I remember thinking “Conquerer Worm” was cool as a kid (it's one of the very few films set in Cromwellian England) and I still like “The Last Valley” for much the same reason(one of even fewer films set during the Thirty Years' War—you gotta hear Michael Caine's Chermahn accent & see a young and impressively-built Brian Blessed as a crew-cut wild man of a mercenary).

fosai says:
May 5, 2009 at 3:22 am

Good coffee.

There is no such thing as good coffee. Count me as the lone voice against that devil brew with that lures in with the enticing aroma and then cruelly laughs as you taste it's foul essence.

I live in Seattle, the home of Starbucks. Ground zero for Juan Valdez and his vile swill. There are independent java joints in every parking lot...I shy away and hiss like a vampire at the Pope's garage sale.

Ross says:
May 5, 2009 at 3:25 am

Oh, and on the coffee front, James, I haven't bought it lately, but Eight O'Clock(e specially their Columbian) was always excellent—even the decaf. I'd buy it even over most boutique brands. ‘Course, it can't compete with Gevalia, but...
Michael Rittenhouse says:
May 5, 2009 at 6:40 am

Seems like they re-enacted the swinging blade for an episode of Dark Shadows, didn't they? That was a British series (going from memory, not Wikipedia) produced in the late '60s, which made it to the States in syndication. Shot directly on video, IIRC, giving it a smudgy quality we took as modern. Barnabas Collins was the father, or the ghost, or something. Either way, he was a vampire.

And James, once again, you've written something that's been ricocheting around in my head for years — the association of a song with the place it was first/most frequently heard. Perhaps it's not age that dulls that connection, but the fact that most of us don't listen to much new pop into our 40s. My exception was rebuilding a car engine a couple of years ago, which required nightly input, and I tuned the garage radio in to the local pop station, which seemed to loop the same 12 songs each day. Every time I hear “Hella Good” now, I smell used motor oil.

Cuneo says:
May 5, 2009 at 7:24 am

Chock-Full-O-Nuts- Buy it for the name, drink it for the kick.

HunkyBobTX says:
May 5, 2009 at 7:41 am

6 feet? SIX? James, you had the chance to rise, Olympian, over the entire Metrodome field and you didn't?! I don't believe it. Can't. How many times in a lifetime would a person ever get to do that? ummmm…. once? In the case of others, none? sigh.

Gina says:
May 5, 2009 at 7:45 am

That was a great video, Mr. Lileks. I'm so scared of heights that you're my hero just for getting a few feet off the ground. 😆 (That was (G)nat in the pink outfit, I take it? Very cute!)

Margaret says:
May 5, 2009 at 8:01 am

Ah, 60s horror flicks! Usually starring Vincent Price as some star crossed lover, mad doctor with a secret lab, guy paying the price for some earlier transgression against the laws of science, morality or both….usually while wearing a fluffy lace collar or an ascot.

Bill McNutt says:
May 5, 2009 at 8:07 am

I dunno James. On the one hand, I'm a big fan of never doing something you don't want to do. On the other, well, there are a couple of ladies in my life whom I wish to believe that I'm brave, heroic, and capable of doing anything. Even if I'm not.

Bill
http://willstuff.wordpress.com
jeischen says:
May 5, 2009 at 8:58 am

Agree that ‘60s horror flicks were pretty lame. The worst were the Poe stories involving Vincent Price, Peter Cushing or Christopher Lee, or all three. Their saving grace was they also usually featured some busty, corset-wearing chamber wench. Price redeemed himself in the 1970s with the Dr. Phibes series. Vincent Price came to my college in 1983 to give a talk. It was right after he did the voiceover for “Thriller” and he had a whole new fan base. He wore Chuck Taylors on stage which made him tres chic.

John Robinson says:
May 5, 2009 at 8:59 am

Years ago, when I was but a callow youth, I got to interview Vincent Price when he spoke at our college. A charming, erudite, gracious man, he acted as if he all the time in the world to talk shop. Theater of Blood (his latest) had just come out, and he said it was his favorite film. When I told him my favorite was House of Wax, and his work had cost me a few nights sleep when I was a boy, Mr. Price just smiled. A charming, erudite, damned CREEPY smile...

RebeccaH says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:00 am

I wouldn't trust balloons either. And for the record, I'm a tea drinker.

juanito - John Davey says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:03 am

AH, you didn't send Natalie up for the top of the Dome for the video work did you? Tell me you didn't....

Was that event open to the public?

At a minimum you acknowledge your fears to your child. I made the mistake of cautioning my then 1 year old to stay away from our friend's pool at my God-Daughter's 1st birthday party one cold November day. She wouldn't heed my council however, and repeatedly keep toddling back to the water's edge. I finally said in my situation resolving Dad voice “Daddy's nervous by the water”. Henceforth, the 1 year old bellows out “Daddy's nervous by water!!” every time we drive pass Bass Lake. Which we have to pass to leave the house, and return to the house, since we live off Bass Lake Road, which our only route to civilization.

Twice a day.
Every day.
For 7 years.
And still does it today.

That kid can run a bit into the ground.

Sometimes I think that a new Poe adaptation would be Poe-riffic! And then I contemplate how it would likely turn out, and can envision how cra-Poe-tacular it would be with George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Damon, Affleck, or Shia Le Boeuf as the featured player(s). Leave well enough alone then!
teach5 says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:06 am

Mumblix, I'm with you 100% on both the coffee and Diet Coke. Just the smell of coffee is intolerable. Then there's coffee breath—the worst! Great pic of you in the chair, JL!

Zoc says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:11 am

Susanne Pleshette saying “dusk.” Things like this are why I love this site.

You look like you're channeling Kirk while sitting in that chair, James (or maybe Matt Decker).

>Steve Ripley Says: “Shoulda sent (G)nat up!”
Heh, indeed! (And, yes, I’d have avoided the suicide balloons as well.)

GardenStater says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:14 am

Dusk: http://johntranter.com/notes/px/rage.jpg

Garry says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:29 am

You want to see “The Gazebo” (MGM, 1959, Glenn Ford, Debbie Reynolds, John McGiver, Carl Reiner). You'll have many new mental associations to hang on your own gazebo, especially when it rains. Or if there are pigeons.

Kim says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:51 am

LOL – I guess I wasn’t the only one who thought you had sent Natalie up in the chair! LOLOL! :) She wouldn't have been chicke.............afraid. : D

curegirl0421 says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:01 am

What a great video… but I too thought you sent Nat up… only because I could *swear* you threw a kiss to whoever was filming you from on high.

Far be it from me, though, to think that you shouldn’t have just as close a relationship with your camera man as you wish! 😛

For the record, also, I prefer cheap coffee. Cheap, weak coffee. I really can’t say I like my coffee like I like my men, although it seems that’s what I end up with anyway, haha.

gmann63 says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:03 am

Coffee – I buy the Starbucks bags of ground bean, usually Sumatra or Verona; the bold flavors. In a pinch, Seattle's Best Henry's Blend works, but I just can't stand the cheap stuff, and yes, that includes Chock Full o’ Nuts and 8 O’Clock and Maxwell House and their ilk.
And what's the deal with the hype that Dunkin' Donuts brand has gotten?

All I hear are raves, but I bought some and it was a watery, bitter, most unpleasant experience. Coffee, like bourbon, is worth spending more on for quality. Life's too short.

**GardenStater** says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:17 am

Count me in–I thought (G)Nat was up in the balloon chair, thinking “Man, why is my dad such a Nervous Nellie? This is FUN!”

**hpoulter** says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:22 am

gmann63 – maybe so, but I don’t consume 6 cups of bourbon every day (it’s a thought, though). One has to cut costs somewhere. At least I do. It all depends on how much you enjoy it. For me, it's not a big deal.
I just need caffeine to stay productive in the AM, and I don’t like sodas.

**Preptile** says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:32 am

Dunno the year that movie came out ,but as first run Saturday matinee fare it probably cost me a quarter .I came out of there blinking in the bright sun and wondering why they made movies that scared people like that .
It was my first taste of existential angst ,with the possible exception of dental appointments and vaccination days .Always that impending doom edging ever closer ,and no escape in sight .This was no singing cowboy movie w Gene Autry or Roy Rogers .No Audie Murphy winning before wooing .
This was Hitchcock ,and a part of adultery of which I was skeptical .
Rightly so it seems ,as approaching deadlines like Tax Day still queasy .
The only way to unwind after that ,short of debauchery , is that cup of sissified decaf ,loaded w cream sugar and rollaids . MMmmm .

**MikeH** says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:49 am

For coffee..

1. Dunkin Donuts original blend
2. Hannaford's premium store blend, either the 100% Colombian blend or donut shop blend
3. Chock full o nuts

Starbucks, it's ok but worth the hype

**Elaine at Lipstickdaily** says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:49 am

Yeah . . . I know what you mean about songs not having that same association. No one told me I wouldn't remember things the same way when I got older. Rats. I would have listened to better music.
DryOwlTacos says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:50 am

Re UP: I would totally do that! No problem with heights, just as long as it's not upside down. (That really cuts down on the number of coasters I can ride.) I hope it *was* Natalie in the chair shooting your video. Kid already has better camera skills than most adults, and I could tell by seeing her in the background that she REALLY wanted to go up. Otherwise you were blowing kisses to some dude, and that's just...creepy.

Re 60s and 70s horror movies: I saw a fair few with the Price/Lee/Cushing trifecta back in the day, but the demographic for those was the demographic of the scarier, bloodier horror movies of today—teens and young adults. Hopefully, we outgrow it. I don't need horror movies to be scared anymore, since we now have CNN and FOXnews.

DryOwlTacos says:
May 5, 2009 at 10:52 am

Oh, and re coffee: The cheaper the better. None of that Starbucks battery acid for me. The best coffee in my part of flyover country comes from the Racetrac convenience store chain, or from my well-worn West Bend drip-o-lator. (“Waiter, waiter, perc-o-lator! I love coffee, I love tea, I love the Java Jive and it loves me…”)

Spud says:
May 5, 2009 at 11:24 am

I also like the 8 O'Clock (whole bean), though I generally prefer weak coffee.

Can't blame you about the balloons. When you get to a certain age and you don't like to do something just because it makes you uneasy, then you don't do it. Been there, done that, threw away the worn-out t-shirt. I wonder what your initial reaction was when (G)Nat called you a “name”: arm drawn back for a backhand with “I brought you into this world and I can take you out” ready on your lips. You end up not doing it because you love them so much in spite of their churlish behavior, though you may remember the episode next time they “chicken out” of something.

hpoulter says:
May 5, 2009 at 11:43 am

Fear is tough. I could go up in a balloon, but put me in a confined space and watch me freak. I remember going spelunking with a group of friends including my future wife (my one and only such expedition). We had one or two basic flashlights, no training and no sense, really. At one point we had to crawl through a passage that was too low for hands and knees and I said “that's it – I'll see you when you get back.” There were no extra lights (NOW that fact scares me – what a bunch of idiots) so they left me in the roomy antechamber, in total cave darkness, while they pressed on and down. I didn't care. Lots of room, fresh air, no sense of confining walls – I am not afraid of the dark. Later, they told me about all the great things they had seen down in the Earth's bowels, but I didn't care. My (future) wife did NOT point out my chickenosity. Maybe that's why I married her.
hpoulter says:
May 5, 2009 at 11:50 am

About the video –

“Gentlemen, let’s bring it down” – definitely channeling Kirk. Immediately followed by a classic Spock “Fascinating”. Looks like our Host goes into full Trek mode when he is in peril.

And I have to say – for someone with real acrophobia, going up 8 feet knowing that all it took was a flick of the wrist for them to let you go all the way – is achievement enough.

MikeH says:
May 5, 2009 at 12:20 pm

let me correct myself on Starbucks, it's OK but NOT worth the hype.

Now I feel better

grs says:
May 5, 2009 at 12:21 pm

By coincidence, one of the movie channels had a Vincent Price marathon a couple of days ago. All the movies were from the mid-’60s to the early ’70s. I kept the TV on while I puttered around the house, so I got to see parts of several of the movies. What I enjoyed most was seeing these older actors looking uncomfortable in their hip ’70s burnt orange polyester suits with their gigantic lapels and shirt collars. One of the movies was Theater of Blood, worth watching if for no other reason than that it co-starred Diana Rigg.

Wramblin’ Wreck says:
May 5, 2009 at 12:43 pm

hpoulter, I like your thought about 6 cups of bourbon a day, but consider this…after six months of that regimen your liver will be begging the governor for clemency. Just a thought.

I must include myself along with those who dislike coffee. Intensely dislike!! I was taught never to say hate but it fits. In my opinion, the flavor (and smell) of coffee is just one tiny step short of boiled Brussels Sprouts juice. Gah!

Garry says:
May 5, 2009 at 1:36 pm

(Homer voice) ….mmmm, Brussels sprouts juice…. is there anything it can’t do?

Wramblin’ Wreck says:
May 5, 2009 at 1:42 pm

(Homer voice) ….mmmm, Brussels sprouts juice…. is there anything it can’t do?

It can stay away from this house. I’d rather drink cat urine.
Dora Standpipe says:
May 5, 2009 at 2:55 pm

I just had a discussion this past weekend with my father about how the “younger generation” does not drink coffee. Lots do, they just have to have 5 pounds of sugar and cream added to it in order to swallow it down.

I won’t drink coffee in any way shape or form. I went to DQ once and ordered something and it had coffee crystals in it. Mocha was not in the name so I had no clue it would even be in there…I was very upset I wasted 4 bucks on it. (no, it wasn't a moo-latte either, turtle something or other). I was already too far away from the DQ to go back and demand something else. Now I ALWAYS ask what the ingredients are if it is the first time I order it.

Baby M says:
May 5, 2009 at 3:42 pm

...one of the movie channels had a Vincent Price marathon a couple of days ago...

Vincent Price had a wonderful voice, able to project perfect malevolence. he also seemed like he was having fun.

*One of the movies was Theater of Blood, worth watching if for no other reason than that it co-starred Diana Rigg.*

In a catsuit, I hope.

Nancy says:
May 5, 2009 at 4:30 pm

# 1 Dunkin Donuts original blend. But I DO agree it smells better than it tastes.

Adam J. Schmidt says:
May 5, 2009 at 4:44 pm

Diana Rigg, as Emma Peel in the 1960's series The Avengers, is the epitome of feminine beauty. She's the standard by which I've compared woman since I saw the series on VHS in the late 1990's. Which in retrospect set me up for a lot of disappointment in high school and college. Not too many women dressing like Emma Peel the past 10 years.

huddydrvr says:
May 5, 2009 at 5:56 pm

@Adam: Go Whalers! In the early 80's I attended about half the home games (had a 20 game plan seat). I still despise the Habs fans and their “Na-na-na — hey, hey, goodbye!” chant.

Emma Peel: used to see ads in the “Hollywood Spectator” for ladies that dressed like that...

Ed Singel says:
May 5, 2009 at 9:05 pm

Coffee – I prefer Peets French Roast (unfortunately, for health reasons, decaf, although I find it is brewed properly and served fresh it does nicely)
I once attended a hot air balloon festival here in California. They had a tethered one set up, and offered rides. We only went up about 50 feet, but it was enough to get a feel for real ballooning in an open basket. I enjoyed it immensely, and my girlfriend of the time got to check off an item on her bucket list.

Ross says:
May 6, 2009 at 1:59 am

So many things to respond to:
Michael R–that series you remember was not UK-made. It was “dark Shadows”, daytime American TV's attempt to bring gothic horror to soap operas. It was more like As the Stomach Turns meets The Munsters. In first run, it aired(where I grew up) just as I was getting home from school(c.3-3:30pm). Somebody tried to remake it a few years ago with Ben Cross as Barnabas(the vampire). Chiller network just ran a marathon of it last week.
jeischen–if Price's Poe flicks are the worst '60s horror you've ever seen, be very grateful. A couple were even decent adaptations(The Masque of the Red Death).
Trust me, there's so much worse.
Mention of two favorite movies(“Theater of Blood” and “Gazebo”).
Here I also have to remind my fellow Bleatniks to remember(or discover, if you haven't seen any of his work from the '40s & '50s) what a fine, urbane actor Price was(my favorite comic role of his was as the pretentious & ambitious owner of the sponsor of a “$64,000 Question”-type quiz show, opposite Ronald Coleman, in “Champagne for Caesar”). Also, an art collector/writer respected around the world and a famous gourmet. All wrapped up in a funny and wryly self-aware Midwesterner. Add that remarkable, classically trained voice and it's no wonder he was a national treasure, mourned greatly at his passing.
One last note about coffees: all this blather from the supposed die-hards about decaf is bunk. I know: I went from 2-3 POTS of regular/day to decaf, and it all comes down to quality. You get waht you pay for(leaving aside markup on either kind for just the brand cache). Ask any coffee taster or roaster and they'll tell you, the reason decaf usually costs more isn't the extra processing, it's that the beans are higher quality(to compensate for any flavor the decaf'ing process takes away).

Pam-EL says:
May 6, 2009 at 11:48 pm

Boyer's Kona Blend. French press, 2 minutes. Decant into handy decanter, pour into cup, drink, and you will see the face of God.

Patrick says:
May 7, 2009 at 7:14 am

I've found Starbucks to be overrated and overpriced. Besides, I could never remember to order it the right way.

The best coffee I've had comes from QuikTrip or Waffle House. When I used to go to QuikTrip for my morning buzz, I'd mix the coffee with the cappuccino. Made for some very strong coffee that had me nearly walking on the ceiling. I could see into the future. I was setting off the Richter.

The best coffee is of course free coffee, e.g. coffee from work.
**skeneogden** says:
May 7, 2009 at 5:25 pm

The Pit and the Pendulum, The Crawling Eye and Them really creeped me out when I was a kid. It's been a long time since I've thought about those movies. Thanks a lot for the reminder!
Outside the office the other day I saw this:
Pink? This is new. I have no idea what it means. I assume they colors stand for something – this must be plugged, that must be fixed, this leads directly to the land of the underground lizard army, that sort of thing. But this is what I really meant to snap:
No, not the gum. The shell. Utility poles of post-war vintage are streamlined things, modern, without the dead hand of history fussing up their clean pure lines. Now we want old-style poles, because we tired of clean pure lines and wanted something that said Tradition. As Tevye said: *Why do we want ornamentation from an ancient civilization on our urban infrastructure? I don't know. But it's a tradition! And it's what Cass Gilbert wants us to do.* Dai dai dai dai, etc.

Look at the way the base of shaft undulates to echo the form of the shell. Why a shell? No specific reason. It was a Roman detail, and hence part of the wholesale importation of ancient styles designed to give our new nation the heft and gravity of a previous great civilization. It’d like to wake up in 2000 years and see some culture on another planet had tailfins and googie architecture and sleek Moderne skyscrapers. Sure, that would mix up decades, but after a certain distance the stylistic variants of a culture bleed together. We’re only 80 years away from the end of the 20s, and we think they look like the 30s. The only reason we can keep the 50s, 60s and 70s straight is because they were important to the high holy Boomers, which is also the reason the culture has a hard time reprocessing the 80s and 90s. Boomers lost interest in those decades. If Joe Cocker had sung the theme for...
“Miami Vice,” they might have been less contemptuous, but, well, man, Reagan and all that electric music, it’s all over.

Of course the 60s the Boomers worship lasted for about 47 minutes, but that’s another story. Meanwhile, 2000 years later, Rome still haunts the streets. Remarkable.

Ordinary day – writing and editing and writing and resizing, preparing tomorrow’s work, Today! It rained, it was sunny, it hailed, it was hot, the winds were cool. Had a moment to test out a nifty little WD media box – about 90 bucks at BestBuy. Small, light, HDMI & regular-flavor output. The idea is simple: hook up a USB hard drive, and play your movies on your TV. Voila. It’s not the Apple TV, and for that I am grateful.

I HATE the Apple TV.

There, I said it. Oh GOD that felt good. Seriously. I don’t loath it like I’ve hated other pieces of technology – my Sony Blu-Ray, for example, has a remote designed by people who would shriek in horror if you pressed the TiVo peanut to their flesh. It burns, it burns! Pushing the biggest, most convenient and obvious buttons sends you to some “top menu” that has commands for everything you want to do except keep watching the movie. The Apple TV interface is buttery and lovely, and the remote is wise and simple. The WD interface is plain but effective, and the remote is too light – you feel like you’re holding the husk of a large dead insect. But I plug a drive in the back of the WD, and hey presto, there are all the movies and other media files I wish to enjoy, including the 36GB family film I shot in HD.

The Apple TV insists we are living in 2039, and prefers to get its content wirelessly, or by telepathy. Whichever. It’s a means of locking in purchased iTunes content, of course, and I don’t mind that; no one made me buy it, and you can load content you get from anywhere into iTunes if you have rudimentary skillz. But you can’t plug a USB drive into the USB slot and load content. No, you have to carve out a fortnight to load that 36GB file on the machine, OR stream it – which is fun, if anyone else is using the network, and you don’t have a dual-band router that can pipe 802.11n to the AppleTV while the kid’s old laptop is sucking down YouTube at the older speeds.

Yes, there is a USB slot in the AppleTV. It’s just not useful. It’s like a hole in the sidewalk where they might put a pole some day, and run up a flag for a country that hasn’t been founded yet.

Yes, I know there’s boxee; I looked at it early on, and I’m sure I could figure it out, but the minute I ran up against using atvusb-creator to get boxee on the AppleTV, I said NEXT. To quote a message from the boxee forums:

I have just created Patchstick using ATV USB Creator (1.0.b10). In this I selected from the third drop-down menu on the RH side “XBMC/Boxee for Mac” option (somewhat confusing as all 4 options automatically
10/30/13, 9:20 AM

Wednesday, May 06 | The Bleat.

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=2101

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When I look at the contents of the Patchstick it shows two plugins .. one under the folder “SoftwareMenu”, and the other “XMBCLauncher” .. but no mention of Boxee.

Oh, I have time for that.

What chaps my aspirin: I share Lord Jobs’ distaste for physical media. I want to replace all my DVDs with digital versions; I want all my media accessible from any device at any time. That’s all! Make it so! But it’s amusing how iMovie has inched away from the DVD authoring program, like a fine French chef ignores his half-brother who sells paper plates. I make DVDs of the family movies out of habit now, for archival purposes – I’ll always have a picked Mac capable of reading the discs, and also several digital copies that can be adapted for the format wars of the future. Fine. But if you’re going to give me the tools to make a 36GB movie, AND forbid me to use Blu-Ray to burn them – not that I want to, really, because that format will be gone when my kid’s in high school – then let me put them in the Apple TV without devoting half the Obama administration to a wireless transfer. OKAY?

Hence the WD box.

Oh, but there’s more! Whenever I mention that I was at Hollywood to rent a movie, I get the snoots: you rent DVDs? From an actual store? With people and everything? Not for me. I get what I want from Netflix, but I am responsible for getting my wife a movie to watch Friday night. She is excessively busy and not technologically inclined, and it has yet to come to pass where I can force her at Taser-point to sit down Thursday night and rent a movie from the Apple store. So I go to the store on Wednesday when the new releases come in, and get something that fits her tastes. Today, however, I SWEAR I will make her get a movie and download it.

Me, I have my Netflix queue ordered three weeks out, predicated on a Tuesday drop for Friday delivery. Because you cannot leave entertainment to chance.

One more note from the boxee forum:

XMBCLauncher handles both boxee and xbmc I suggest, enabling ssh and bintuils.

To the untrained eye, this is indistinguishable from the spam I find in my comments section.
**LATER**: fine new Mpls update, and miscreant roundup around 1 PM at buzz.mn. See you ASAP.

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**Pass it along, if you wish**

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44 RESPONSES TO *wednesday, may 06*

**BUY CHINESE GOLD AND PHARMACEUTICALS** says:
May 6, 2009 at 12:35 am

[this is indistinguishable from the spam I find in my comments section.

Ouch. We're not all professional writers, you know? Just simple folk trying to express ourselves in a big world, and maybe make a buck at the same time.

Speaking of which, BUY CHINESE GOLD AND MEET GIRLS GOLD GOLD GOLD...,

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**trevor** says:
May 6, 2009 at 1:02 am

I've jailbroken my apple tv, and although I was somewhat nervous, everything was remarkably easy. Simply follow the instructions on the wiki (or was it a google code page?) and you'll be watching boxee in about an hour (after the jailbreak, you have to download boxee and install it, but it's all built-in to the menu). Worse comes to worst, you can always factory restore and resync with itunes.

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**Aaron** says:
May 6, 2009 at 6:08 am

Thanks for that. Best review of Apple TV I have seen, and I was thinking of buying one. Now I think I'll hold off.

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**Aaron** says:
May 6, 2009 at 6:12 am

BTW, it's loathe (verb) not loath (adj). Sorry ...

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**Michael** says:
May 6, 2009 at 7:34 am

I am fairly satisfied with my WD media player – it plays DIVX coded video quite well. Save videos as big as you can (I use 720 x 404) if you're hooking it to a widescreen set, otherwise the crawlies get annoying when the scene changes.

Also, go to the site and get the newest firmware, 1.02.07 I think.

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**HunkyBobTX** says:
May 6, 2009 at 7:40 am

I guess I have a different take the other side of the physical media thing. I would like to have a physical object in my grubby meat hooks after I hand over my filthy lucre to purchase it.
I want a DVD/CD and case, with liner notes. I like having something tangible. Only getting Gigabytes of data just seems like a gyp.

On the other hand, if I want to load it on my MP3 player or store it on my hard drive that ought to be my choice, so long as I don’t sell that copy. I still want a hard backup. Especially for CDs. I suppose if they put all the liner notes and art work and lyric sheets that come with an album in a soft format I’d be OK with that, but there’s something satisfying about being able to page through the liner notes while listening to an album.

Another problem with these media formats like CDs, DVD’s and MP3 – (and I think our genial host has covered this here previously or elsewhere) What happens when the format changes and I’m left with something unreadable? to me this is one reason why paper books are still a great idea. Once you buy it it’s there until the paper goes away which is usually a long, long time.

Granted, sometime that’s a disadvantage – Most people don’t want to keep copies of the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal around after a few days. In which case soft versions are definitely preferable. No muss, no fuss, just press the delete key and the bits are all flipped to zero (or one).

This makes it all a little too ephemeral, however. I hope that things that are saved to this electronic media will last as well as things that were originally printed on paper.

I have a hard time believing that someone someday will pay top dollar for a first edition of a novel written in 2025 that only came out in electronic format, in the same way someone would pay for a first edition of a Dickens novel.

MikeH says:
May 6, 2009 at 7:40 am

Call me backwards, but here’s my exposure to technology:

I still have a VCR, most of my videos are on VHS. I haven’t replaced my $30.00 DVD player that’s broken. My television set which works fine is from the 1980’s
I don’t have cable
Although my phone has lots of features on it, I only use it to make/receive phone calls and the occasional text. That’s it.
I only have a digital camera cause I got it as a Christmas gift. Though I do bounce around on the internet, it doesn’t take up my whole day. And i’m quite happy with keeping XP on my computer, unless somebody upgrades my computer for free. And I don’t do any gaming.

I am definitely not opposed to change, nor do I think people who grasp the new technology are weenies. But when I read about all the new technology, most of the time I don’t even know what most of it is.

I guess it’s early and haven’t had my coffee yet, good day.

Jeff says:
May 6, 2009 at 8:00 am

Underground facilities are indeed marked with specific colors:

- Red is for electrical power
- Yellow is for gas, petroleum, and other things that go boom
Orange is for communications lines (phone, TV)
Blue is for water
Brown is for sanitary sewers (that figures)
Green is for storm drains
Pink is for land survey monumentation

Not just any pink: “High Visibility Safety Pink”. Makes me feel more secure already.

ArganikMark says:
May 6, 2009 at 8:03 am

I'm with MikeH although I've had one cup of coffee. We still have a Zenith VCR circa 1988. Works fine. Have a simple DVD player and sometimes even use it. Have a simple (free with the plan) cell phone that holds a charge for 5 days and receives AND makes calls. No texting. Have cable that's not digital although they're making me offers I may not be able to refuse. Love vinyl more than CD. No iPod. No iTunes. Computer is for email, Word and reading Lileks, Achwood and the Daily Beast. The Onion every Wednesday. And Wang Chung was under-rated.

John says:
May 6, 2009 at 8:14 am

Me, I stopped reading when I got to the Joe Cocker allusion. A couple of months ago, for the first time in probably a couple of decades, I heard a Joe Cocker song on the radio. This was in Portugal. Somehow, it made sense. European radio isn't all zombie music, but let's just say zombies fit in nicely there. The guy and his music belong to a decade, I suppose, but more than that, they belong to a place...a place we don't live in, I hope.

GardenStater says:
May 6, 2009 at 8:25 am

MikeH and ArganikMark: I'm not quite the Luddite you two are; however, I ditched the VCR a few years back, when it became apparent that I would soon no longer be able to rent tapes (and when the price of a DVD player dropped below $100). I've still got a TV with a Cathode Ray Tube. I'll get a flat screen when this one dies (and by the time that happens, the prices of flat screens will be lower than they are today). I have digital cable because it actually reduced my price from what I had been paying. I've got cable TV, Internet, and VOIP phone, the latter because it was so much cheaper than my traditional phone bill had been.

My wife gave me an iPod two Christmases ago, and I think I listened to it once. For some reason, it won't pull in talk radio!

Joe Sixpack says:
May 6, 2009 at 8:33 am

Oh, not getting the latest Apple googaw that 'works' so well makes one a Luddite?

Mr. Lileks clearly has too much time on his hands, especially since his daughter has gone to school.
Nancy says:
May 6, 2009 at 8:37 am

Speaking of Joe Cocker I laughed so hard at this: http://www.elwp.com/Joe%20Cocker.html
Be sure to read the subtitles...

RebeccaH says:
May 6, 2009 at 8:51 am

I have no idea what all that was you were talking about, James, but one thing stuck out. FYI, this Boomer does not worship the 60s (when I came of age). In fact, when I bother to think about the 60s and 70s at all, my face gets hot. I leave it to you to figure out if that's from irritation or embarrassment.

m00se says:
May 6, 2009 at 9:06 am

I'm sorry. If you don't appreciate the true genius of Apple technology, you are officially dysfunctional.

Reeducation camp for you...

Kevin says:
May 6, 2009 at 9:14 am

We have the same problem with non-functional USB ports on our AT&T U-Verse boxes. I install U-Verse and 11 out of 3 customers ask me what the USB port does. There's no instruction in the manual; it was not covered in training; people are reluctant to plug in their external drive to upload or download content to give us a report. On the plus side, customers can upload pictures via Flickr and have a slideshow on their TV during parties and holidays...

js says:
May 6, 2009 at 9:15 am

“- Red is for electrical power
- Yellow is for gas, petroleum, and other things that go boom
- Orange is for communications lines (phone, TV)
- Blue is for water
- Brown is for sanitary sewers (that figures)
- Green is for storm drains
- Pink is for land survey monumentation”

Thanks for that! I don't think I've seen brown or green but the rest make sense.

Anyway that sounds like a cool coloring book.

Raoul Ortega says:
May 6, 2009 at 9:21 am

But, but... It's Open Source™! That makes it DoublePlus GoodSoft™
Don't you realize that if you don't like the documentation, you can make your own? And even rewrite the program to make it better? And do it all for free? And then give back to The Community™?

You just demonstrated why Linux, which has been taking over the desktop since the mid-90s, is still at 1% of the market.
And I must say I fall on the hard copy side. No problem with moving content to a hard disk, but I also like the idea of a physical backup copy I know will be readable years from now, and won't magically evaporate some New Year's Day because the DRM says it's time to die.

**Al Federber** says:
May 6, 2009 at 9:45 am

James, I don't think the 1920s look that much like the 1930s. Seems like the 20s had more in common with the nineteen-teens.

As one of the “high holy Boomers”, I don't share the obsession that you and others of the fretful Generation Jones have for putting all my everything in digital form so that it can be accessed from all places at all times.

Hell, I sometimes spin real 78s on a real record player. I take the heavy black discs out of their fragile paper sleeves, give them a quick dusting with a record brush, and put them on the turntable. I then carefully place the tone arm (which has a metal needle in it) onto the lip of the spinning record. Amazingly, music comes out of the speaker! I really enjoy the process and the sound, even though it involves the handling of actual objects.

Granted, I can't take my collection of 78s with me everywhere, but why would I want to?

**swschrad** says:
May 6, 2009 at 10:12 am

we've a bunch of green, as all our streets are being redone this summer.

if you see Safety Purple, don't dig there. that's nuclear.

or Adam and Steve headed for Iowa.

**roger h (bgbear)** says:
May 6, 2009 at 10:27 am

If you want to want to annoy and annoying neighbor, you could get several paint colors and make marks all over the roadway and walkway in front of their home. Keep them guessing.

(I would suggest using an airbrush and water based washable paints).

**hpoulter** says:
May 6, 2009 at 10:47 am

I think the painting that Lileks sawa was a crew marking up needed sidewalk repairs, and they were using the paint they happened to have left in the truck. When marking cracks in the sidewalk color isn't as critical as marking buried utilities, because you can see them.

I think that shell-shaped bolt cover thingie goes way back. It certainly looks familiar.
curegirl0421 says:
May 6, 2009 at 10:53 am

I'm glad I'm not the only one who obsesses over their Netflix queue's delivery schedule; don't you hate it when something suddenly has a "short wait"? It just throws the whole flow off.

Of course if I have you pegged right, the stuff on your Netflix is probably obscure stuff that's so happy for an audience it practically gets to you a day earlier, just out of sheer joy.

Lileks says:
May 6, 2009 at 10:54 am

I may have been unclear, Al – I meant that most people's conceptions of the 20s are full of Deco and similar styles, which actually came along late and were used quite sparingly. You're right; it looked more like the teens.

While I want everything in digital form, I'm also Mr. Hard Copy, so to speak. I have backups of everything X10 in as many formats as possible. Never know when the EMP will hit.

Trogdor says:
May 6, 2009 at 10:56 am

Apple crapple, my kids had to get iPods, I relented. I told them, don’t expect compatibility (since we have Windows PCs). Then they hit said incompatibility and it's up to me to figure it out. I hate iTech. It's next to impossible to keep 2 kids iPod music separated. You start the iTunes app and it takes over, like a zombie. You have to know to hold down the Shift Key while opening the app to switch users. Intuitive? Not.

I have a Zen Nano Plus MP3 player that I bought 4 years ago, it's super easy to use, and I can download from WalMart.com or easily rip songs from my CDs.

Chris F says:
May 6, 2009 at 10:59 am

If I’m not mistaken, that “shell” thingie is actually an extremely stylized acanthus motif. Have a look at the back of a dollar bill, on the left and right edges of the seal. All the cultural references are unaffected by this observation …

Chris F says:
May 6, 2009 at 11:01 am

Meant to say “pedantic” observation.

Bill McNutt says:
May 6, 2009 at 11:29 am

I'm always amazed at how Roman elements continue to show up in architecture, evry today.

Bill
http://willstuff.wordpress.com
Good time for Kelly Kapoor explains Netflix:

“So then the next movie moves to the top of the queue. So No. 5 becomes No. 4. No. 6 becomes No. 5. No. 3 becomes No. 2, etc., etc. And let's just say that I just sent back 'Love, Actually' — which was awesome — and they sent me 'Uptown Girls' — which was also awesome. But guess what? Now I want to see 'Love, Actually' again, but it's at the bottom of the queue. ‘Oh, no, what do I do?’ What I do is this: I go online. I go click, click, click, and I change the order of the queue so that I can see 'Love, Actually' as soon as I want to. It's so easy, Ryan. Do you really not know how Netflix works?”

Good point, pedantic Chris. A shell doesn't really fit the Roman ornamental grammar – scrolls, fasces, eagles, and lots and lots of acanthus leaves.

I never thought I'd see the day Lileks would write a sentence quite as provocative as:

*Look at the way the base of shaft undulates*

I thought I was the only one who doesn't understand why I can't listen to AM radio on my iPod.

We have the technology!

Yikes!

@ Jeff, green is not stormwater, green is sanitary sewage! If swschrad goes out and checks all that green on the streets, I'll bet a dangled chad that a manhole embossed with “Sanitary” will have green stripes emanating from it.

Stormwater is blue, just like potable water.

Pink is for surveyors, but on piping or underground mapping, pink is reclaimed wastewater (mostly-cleaned wastewater, used primarily for irrigation).

Although there may be a region where the color-codes I'm used to don't apply, I have worked all over the country and green has always been used to mark sanitary sewage, where I have encountered it.
SullyAg says:
May 6, 2009 at 12:52 pm

Don’t be offended, Boomers. Those of us born around 1960 have always felt a bit left out of things. Too young to be hippies, too old to be slackers.

Jerry Ray says:
May 6, 2009 at 2:42 pm

Trogdor, there’s no incompatibility between iPods and Windows PCs. I’ve got a couple of iPods (a big one for the car and work, and a Shuffle for the gym) that I’ve always managed from Windows PCs instead of my Mac laptop.

Now, I’ve never had to try to manage separate libraries for two users, and I’d have no idea how to do that on either a PC or a Mac, but that’s not a Windows problem or an iPod problem, it’s an iTunes problem if anything.

I’m not sure what you’re talking about with iTunes “taking over like a zombie” – do you perhaps have the “auto fill” option enabled, so iTunes automatically dumps a bunch of music onto an iPod when it’s connected?

Also, there’s absolutely no problem with buying non-DRM MP3s from places like Amazon MP3 and using them in iTunes, nor is there a problem with ripping your own MP3s and using them in iTunes. 99% of my MP3s are ripped by me from my CDs (using EAC, because I’m anal, and like it more than iTunes for ripping).

It sounds like most of your iPod and iTunes problems come down to “Ur doing it wrong.” 😃

Dora Standpipe says:
May 6, 2009 at 2:53 pm

CJrun,

I have to disagree with you regarding sewer markings. I have a storm drain at the base of my driveway and it is marked with GREEN as is every other one in my neighborhood./

Also, I would tend to believe that the pink is for surveyors since there was a story in the paper a few weeks back about Minneapolis is going around and checking all the surveyors marks from 100 years ago to check that they are accurate. The project is going to take 3 years since they are located for the most part underground.

Patrick McClure says:
May 6, 2009 at 3:03 pm

Thank the lord I’m not the only baby boom tailender (1963) who despises the older boomers (as a group, not each one individually). Those born from 46 to 56 seem to be the most selfish, uncaring group in US history. As teens and young adults they treated a generation that survived the depression, a world war and a police action and made this country great, as if they were idiots. I have to wonder how long it will take the US to recover once this egocentric group is gone.
hpoulter says:
May 6, 2009 at 3:16 pm

According to the American Public Works Association, Green is for sanitary AND storm. Blue is only drinking for water. Be fair, in many cities, there is little difference between sanitary and storm sewers. If you know what “Combined Sewer” and “CSO” mean, you probably wish you didn’t.

Petronius says:
May 6, 2009 at 3:33 pm

Re the lightpoles: I have seen some communities where they put up ultramodern lightpoles over the street, all streamlined and unornamented. They then attached about half-way up the pole, over the sidewalk, an ornamented light element that was a 90’s idea of what Victorian design looked like. It was the stupidest thing I’ve ever seen. In downtown Chicago they use a pole called and Boulevard Electrolier, I believe. Which is an unornamented pole with bolt on skirts in a fancier style. Sometimes some car hits the pole, breaks the skirt, and they just bolt on another.

Maybe in ancient Greece convenience stores had really bad Ionic or Corinthian columns, while the Parthenon got the good stuff.

js says:
May 6, 2009 at 3:34 pm

Brown is for those chocolate fountains you see at fancy parties.

hpoulter says:
May 6, 2009 at 3:38 pm

Well Patrick McC, as a member of that despised boomer generation that doesn’t share those views (as you said, you weren’t talking about us individually) I have been waiting through several generations now (X,Y,?) waiting for signs that there has been some improvement, but I don’t see it. Young people today as a group seem just as dopey and deluded as we did as a group. And “Che” t-shirts are selling better than ever.

Speaking of “Che” chic, our Post-boomer President isn’t just repudiating Boomers – he’s repudiating everything that came before him – devaluing and deprecating the whole American experience – and the young folks seem to love it. So, I don’t think our passing will improve things much.

Trogdor says:
May 7, 2009 at 10:48 am

Jerry Ray, you may be right about me doing it wrong, but if my kids download an iTunes song for $1.00, I can’t put it on my MP3 now can I? (not that I really want any Jonas Bros., but I do like Thousand Foot Krutch). Unless they select MP3 format, which they don’t because they are not savvy like their daddy.

Yeah, like a zombie, you start that iTunes up and it has to have it’s flesh eating iPod connected so it can auto update. The fact that I’ve spent at least 2 hours figuring things out for iTunes that should have taken 5 minutes with any standard MP3 software is why it’s “incompatible”. Good thing I’m a software engineer or it would have taken longer!
Keith says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:04 pm

Um…what does WD stand for? You are pushing my limits for techno lingo.

Will Collier says:
May 8, 2009 at 12:14 pm

The AppleTV is way too limited, and underpowered to boot. My solution: a Mac Mini. More expensive, but much easier to manage, and you get the bonus feature of having an actual Mac hooked up to your TV when you want it. Install Perian, and Front Row will play back most anything you point at it. Another one-time tweak and the Mini will play 5.1 surround your receiver via optical cable. It even comes with that nifty Apple remote.

For saving content, don’t even bother with the internal hard drive, just set up a server drive (or in my case, multiple drives) on an old computer somewhere in the house, and link it over via wireless or ethernet. I long since ripped my entire DVD collection, and Front Row plays them like a champ.

I guess you COULD use a USB drive, if you really wanted to…
default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Called UPS to see where the gazebo might be. When I’d entered the tracking number into the website, I was warned that there was an exception attached to my order. There was no explanation. Just: exception. Googled the term; first hit was on a message board devoted to steroids. The poster appeared to be worried that someone had intercepted the package, and was advised by others to clean out the house. That doesn’t seem to apply here. I don’t think I’m running afoul of Federal interstate gazebo-laws. A little more research suggested that it’s a catch-all term for “Things not going exactly as planned, and never you mind why, little mister.” Since the gazebo had made it from its Texas birth through Kansas up to Eagan, I figured I might discuss the matter with a real person.

If such a thing existed.

It took more googling to find out how to get a UPS customer service rep. You have to ask for one when you're given the chance to say what you need, and you have to use the right words – O Brown, cast down Thine Eyes Upon my
Case and Lift the cup of Exception From My Lips, and then you enter a melody in the plagal node using your numeric pad, then wait. Eventually I got a person, and she asked for all the info.

“There's an exception,” she said.

“I know,” I said. “What does that mean?”

“I can’t tell. But I’m not showing any movement on the package since the 29th.”

I filed that metaphor away for old age, when constipation becomes an issue. “Yes. What could that mean?” I realized it was a foolish question, and I’d asked it twice, but I really did want to hear someone say it was possible they lost a 10-foot tall box that weighed 147 pounds.

“I can’t tell. You’ll have to contact the vendor and put a trace on it.”

Hold on. Wait up. Tarry here a moment, my boon companion. Why would I call the vendor? You have it.

“They’re the only one that can put a trace on it.”

Unaware I was speaking with the Delphi Oracle, I persisted: Why? I’m looking at the route; they gave it to you two weeks ago. It made it all the way up to the Eagan warehouse, and then winked out of this plane of existence, perhaps leaving the dissonant fragrance of a unicorn fart. What could they possibly be able to do that you can’t?”

We went on like that for a while. I didn’t want a solution, I just wanted an explanation.

Getting none, I called Amazon. Busy. Kept dialing; got through; a nice cheerful lass said hello, and I said I’d ordered a gazebo through Target.com using my Amazon.com account, and UPS lost it, and said they had to put a trace.

“Oh gosh,” she said, in a tone that said “First day on the bomb-defusing squad.” She plowed through my records. Found no gazebo.

“I see a West Fargo address,” she said.

What? Oh no. NO. “That’s my sister – I have it in my account for gifts. It didn’t go there, did it?”

“No, I’m in Grand Forks,” she chirped. “Go North Dakota!”

I asked her if she could access my Target.com orders made through Amazon, and she realized she hadn’t heard my earlier comment. (Honestly, I did say it.) She said I’d have to talk to Target.com, and connected me. The phone was answered by Cr is o er, which is how “Christopher” sounds when the connection drops out every half second. I think he knew what I was talking about. He promised to have it there tomorrow, or another would be sent out
So apparently Target.com has a special satellite they can use to look through roofs and find the box in a warehouse far below, and then they use a tractor beam to deliver it.

Either that, or Target calls UPS and says “hello, we’re looking for a big box about yea long, yea high – could you go in the back where you keep the stuff that hasn’t been delivered for no particular reason, and see if you have it? Sure, I’ll hold . . . You have it? Great! Why wasn’t it delivered? Oh, I see. Yeah, it is heavy. I’d pretend it didn’t exist, either. Okay, thanks. Bye.”

It won’t be here tomorrow, I suspect. That’s when I call Target and tell them to send another, but don’t overnight it. Eat the shipping and I’ll be happy.

Curious Lucre and Lance Lawson today, and 100 Mysteries on Friday. Lance is up now. If you only stopped by yesterday morning you missed the out-of-context ad contest and the Mpls update. Enjoy! See you around.
see if it's salvageable.

This thing happens once in a while, especially when heavy items are thinly packaged in cardboard with straps to save money. It's cheaper to lose a couple shipments here and there rather than spend more on wooden crates.

**HunkyBob** says:
May 7, 2009 at 11:39 am

I've experience a few UPS “exceptions”. You can tell the tracking system was written by a Comp. Sci. person. Computers no longer have “errors”, they have “exceptions”. anyway the exception I experienced was I wasn't at home to sign for the thing. Had to go up to the depot and sign for it. The orange and brown slip they left for me to sign must have had an exception and was blown away by the wind.

**DensityDuck** says:
May 7, 2009 at 11:50 am

Of course it doesn’t have an “error”. “error” means that there's a PROBLEM. Customers hear “problem” and they get all woogly and do crazy things like going to the competition. That's why we have “exceptions” now.

**swschrad** says:
May 7, 2009 at 11:50 am

check to see if they have a customer counter at the Eagan location (we can't have all the fun alone at Broadway and Industrial,) if so, drive in, wave the tracking number, ask them to bring it out.

you can call Target.com on the phone while there, right? go speaker and get everybody in on the party?

you could even wear your steenkin' badge if you happened to only have time after a trip to the office, I should think, without getting into hot water, as a Professional Journalist Following Up A Tip™.

**rbj** says:
May 7, 2009 at 11:57 am

“I don't think I’m running afoul of Federal interstate gazebo-laws.”

Ha. After Lance gets through with you, you'll be heading to Ol' Sparky for first degree Doris razzing.

So the warehouse they stuffed the Ark in is in Egan, MN, eh? We're getting it narrowed down, folks.

**Bookworm** says:
May 7, 2009 at 11:58 am

Yes, there's a customer counter there. I've had to go there a few times to pick things up myself. Amazon, for whatever reason, occasionally ships my book or DVD orders UPS instead of USPS. I've never figured out why. And, of course, I'm never home when they try to deliver them.

But it gives me a good excuse to go to the nearby Genghis Grill afterwards for dinner.

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=2119
John Wright says:
May 7, 2009 at 11:59 am

Exceptional service. I'm surprised that Amazon wasn't more helpful. I usually have pretty good luck with them.

M Geiger says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:14 pm

Bookworm Says:
May 7th, 2009 at 11:58 am

“...Amazon, for whatever reason, occasionally ships my book or DVD orders UPS instead of USPS. I've never figured out why. And, of course, I'm never home when they try to deliver them.”

Well, they obviously want their customers to have the most exceptional purchasing experience possible.

Don Dalrymple says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:16 pm

To get an actual person on the phone at UPS, just keep repeating “agent”.

james o. says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:21 pm

You have my sympathies. I deal with several freight carriers with billing/delivery issues, and UPS is the one the one that's the most miserable to deal with (but DHL is making a run on them).

You learn most about a company's true commitment to quality by how they handle things that go wrong.

hpoulter says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:22 pm

“exceptional” – har!

Since I write computer code for a living, I hadn't even realized that “exception” is an unusual word for “we have a problem”. I guess it is, but I am sadly used to it.

I have that same gazebo model, too. Third year on it, in a very windy area. There are a few patches on the canvas, but it hangs in there. Flipped on its side once (what a crash on the wood deck) but was almost undamaged.

I picked mine up at Target – they enlisted every teen-age employee in the store to help wrestle it into my vehicle. At my end, I did what I always do – unpack the box in the car and carry it in a piece or two at a time.

hpoulter says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:25 pm

“UPS is the one the one that's the most miserable to deal with (but DHL is making a run on them)”

Maybe it's just my part of the country, but I will take UPS over DHL
any day. I cringe when I see DHL is my shipper -especially for something valuable or fragile. They once left a new Dell Computer, unsigned for, sitting on my front porch in the rain. I get something by UPS almost every week, and I can't remember the last problem.

swschrad says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:29 pm

wonder if the “exception” is there is an empty box there after a couple of folks took an early day off?

Charlie Young says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:31 pm

Do you think she had any idea that the statement “not seeing any movement on the package” could be taken that way?

Patrick says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:37 pm

I have dealt with all of the shipping agents at one point or another, and the only one I’ve had prob...er, exceptions with was Fed-Ex. I had shipped via Fed-Ex hundreds of times and a few times came up with exceptions. Usually the exceptions turned out to be wrong addressee info, or the package somehow became damaged (probably used it to play baseball with – it was a Fed-Ex tube or bag filled with rolled-up road construction plans), or some such nonsense.

“I can’t tell. But I’m not showing any movement on the package since the 29th.’

“I filed that metaphor away for old age, when constipation becomes an issue.”

I had a few people at work come over and ask if I was OK when I choked on my tea over that.

swschrad says:
May 7, 2009 at 12:42 pm

ahh, the days of the National Lampoon and their (Nixon) White House Tapes album.

“Here is a list of the President’s movements for the week.

“Monday, nothing.

“Tuesday, nothing.

“Wednesday, good one, some blood.”

(click, hiss of changing channels)

ak13820 says:
May 7, 2009 at 1:00 pm

We never had any problems with UPS until they recently switched drivers in our neighborhood. The new guy doesn’t seem to understand that the numbers on the address label have to match the numbers over our door. He keeps bringing boxes to our neighbor, because the neighbor and my husband have the same first name.
It's irritating, but I kind of feel sorry for him. If you can't even deliver a box to the right house, what chance do you have in life?

Mr_Lilacs says:
May 7, 2009 at 1:22 pm

We had several problems with cable about a month ago and their infernal phonetree (our local monopoly is the one that tries to adjectivize its name). The magic bean to get in touch with a reasonable facsimile of a real person in their system is to call, listen to the entire list of irrelevant options, hang up and call back immediately. I'm going to try that trick on other phonetrees too.

Ric Locke says:
May 7, 2009 at 1:25 pm

The magic word is “representative”. When the robot starts talking to you, just ignore what it says and chant “representative” at every pause. (The only exception is if it asks you if you want to ship a package. Just say “no” whether you do or not.)

This works for both UPS and FedEx. I run a little pack-and-ship store, and have to do that fairly often. No doubt, as the word gets out and more and more people do that, they'll change the system. The very idea of having an actual human being answering the phone gives Executives™ heartburn.

As for “exceptions” — you should realize that once the package is scanned by the pickup driver it ceases to exist as far as the shipping company is concerned. There is the Tracking Number, and only the Tracking Number. Barcode scanners read the Tracking Number, and the computer system then decides where it should be next. If the Tracking Number is not read at the predicted point the computer declares an Exception, and the system comes to a halt as regards that Tracking Number. If a heavy package is label side down, the barcode scanner doesn't see the barcode. Exception! At that point there is no package. The forklift driver can see it, the truck driver can see it, you know it's there, but its number has disappeared from the computer system and therefore from the Ken of Mankind.

You, as the person who paid for the item, have no part in the process. Only the original shipper — the “sender” — can apply for a trace, or for a refund or insurance settlement. It may be worthwhile to try that, but your best bet is to get them to send you another one while they fight the bureaucracy and its computer support. Maybe the next one will be right-side-up when it goes through the scanner(s).

Eventually the shipping company will pile all the unclaimed packages outside and sell them off as “unclaimed freight”.

Regards,
Ric

Tory Mitchell says:
May 7, 2009 at 1:47 pm

Do people still say...er...write..."LOL"? Prob'ly not, but i am...LOL!
...Tory
roger h (bgbear) says:
May 7, 2009 at 1:56 pm

I thought DHL only did international now.

I like FedEx ground.

Kevin says:
May 7, 2009 at 2:19 pm

“To get an actual person on the phone at UPS, just keep repeating ‘agent’.”

Yes, I acknowledge this, however– it is acceptable to me to talk INTO a machine, but I resent talking TO a machine. I think that, as we have given in to the foul phonetrees, we have bowed our humanity in submission. What I find often works is hitting the ’0’ button, oh, about 37 times in 12 seconds.

Julie says:
May 7, 2009 at 2:32 pm

I think “dissonant fragrance” is a bit of a mixed metaphor, but nevermind, I kind of like it.

My husband has used the extreme profanity method of getting to a real person… when pressing “0”, or saying “agent”, hasn’t worked. In frustration he has let fly some colorful language and lo and behold is transferred to a live person right quick…

swschrad says:
May 7, 2009 at 3:06 pm

yep, I do well hitting the 0 key until my finger is stiff, listening to see if the robot is still droning on, and if so, keep hitting it. over and over and over again like a machine-gun mowing down all the little hooks in the VRU submenu diagram on a whiteboard in a long-abandoned conference room.

back and forth, raking over the dead-ends and “this option is not valid”s, beeping out any trace of the endless maze that either ends up where you started, or the system hangs up on you because “you have reached the end of the menu, goodbye!”

firing at the stupidity of suits with a tin desk and a telephone who think walling off the customers is good business.

until I finally get a “click” — “Hello, this is Esmeralda, how may we –” and the battery on the cell goes dead.

Dave says:
May 7, 2009 at 3:07 pm

This reminds of the time not too long ago when my wife went to the UPS website to track a package, and when she entered the tracking number, the package's most recent status update said “TRAIN DERAILMENT.” We both Googled for news about a train wreck in the city that was listed, but we never found anything. Must not have been too bad, because the package arrived a day or two later.
erp says:
May 7, 2009 at 3:20 pm

The string is the most fun I've had all day.

hpoulter, we do the same thing when we get home with something heavy or bulky. That's why we don't work muscling merchandise in a discount store.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
May 7, 2009 at 3:22 pm

Living as I do 2 miles past the sticks in the Colorado mountains I have had many dealings with the UPS and FedEx. Regularly I do not get packages as scheduled due to poor weather, lazy drivers or other capricious acts of the Gods.

Pushing “0” a few dozen times was always the best way to get someone's attention. But now, I have the local dispatch center's direct phone numbers; for both UPS and FedEx. The day I am expecting a package I will call the dispatch center to find out if the package is being delivered as promised. All packages have been delivered since I started this routine.

juanito - John Davey says:
May 7, 2009 at 3:29 pm

Dave Says:
May 7th, 2009 at 3:07 pm

This reminds of the time not too long ago when my wife went to the UPS website to track a package, and when she entered the tracking number, the package's most recent status update said “TRAIN DERAILMENT.”

I'm curious as to what other type of status updates they have. Like “Apocalypse”, or some other mayhem: “It says here the last status update was ARRIVED ROCKLIN CA @ 8:36 ‘APOCALYPSE’ so I guess it might be here tomorrow instead of this afternoon”.

Al Federber says:
May 7, 2009 at 3:42 pm

Who wants to see movement on their package?

swschrad says:
May 7, 2009 at 3:49 pm

movement of the package? man, that's the best part! woo!

Charlie Young says:
May 7, 2009 at 4:39 pm

James, did you really say “unicorn fart” to that lovely service rep?

JerseyAmy says:
May 7, 2009 at 4:48 pm

I realize this comment is coming late in the day, so few will probably see it, and since I'm adding a link to the interwebs it'll have to wait to be approved, but I think it's worth posting anyway. Somebody
sent me this website years ago, and I highly recommend it any time you need to talk to a human being when calling customer disservice: http://www.gethuman.com/us/

Trogdor says:
May 7, 2009 at 5:09 pm

If only I had ordered my Colt 45 ammo from Target.com, I might have it by now...

Cuneo says:
May 7, 2009 at 5:09 pm

What if Franz Kafka were alive today? And what if he had ordered something over the web that went bad, man? Imagine the grist for the mill of his cretive juices.

Cuneo says:
May 7, 2009 at 5:12 pm

I mean, Mr. Kafka orders a gazebo, and they (eventually) deliver a one hundred forty seven pound cockroach.

swschrad says:
May 7, 2009 at 5:36 pm

the gethuman link is very, very useful. highly recommended

RB says:
May 7, 2009 at 5:49 pm

You actually found a way to talk to a fer-real person at Amazon?! I don't believe it. You're either making that up or you're dreaming again.

Or maybe this is something new they're trying. I gave up on Amazon a few years ago, when they double billed my credit card. The only way I could find to contact them was email. They told me, via email, that I just didn't know how to read my statement. Contested the charge with my bank, a wrote letters to every physical address for Amazon that I could find. One musta finally gotten through, the charge was eventually reversed. No explanation or apology. Been a happy B&N customer ever since!

jenifersf says:
May 7, 2009 at 7:19 pm

UPS has lied to me and said a delivery was attempted when it wasn't, that a delivery would be made after normal delivery hours, etc. But that was only once. Most of the time they were okay, much better than DHL.

Seattle_Dave says:
May 7, 2009 at 10:10 pm

Somewhere I have a picture of a large cardboard box DHL left leaning against the front door of a sorority house my organization used to rent for the summer. The door had a 12 X 15 inch sign on it (about two feet above the top of the box) reading “THIS DOOR IS
NOT IN USE. PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE DELIVERIES AT THIS DOOR.
TAKE THEM TO THE KITCHEN DOOR ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE
HOUSE [arrow pointing north] AND THE COOK WILL SIGN FOR
THEM."

I later posted a hand-written addendum reading “DHL: THIS
WOULD INCLUDE YOU” which seemed to do the trick. “Oh! By
‘deliveries’ they meant things being delivered, like boxes! Well, they
should have explained it better the first time.”

shesnailie says:
May 7, 2009 at 10:36 pm

_@_.v – sweet… ups slug just left me a garden gazebo and i didn’t
even order one!

zefal says:
May 8, 2009 at 12:22 am

That's a Sultan's tent not a gazebo.

Ross says:
May 8, 2009 at 3:30 am

I never used to have trouble with UPS, but since the start of this
year, several deliveries have ended up back at the retailer. They
claim all 3 attempts were made, but there were never any post-its
and I sleep a few feet from a fire-alarm-loud door buzzer(which
never went off). So, either the driver for my area-supposedly the
same guy as last year, who was excellent) has had a serious head
wound & some sort of number aphasia that only affects addresses,
or they lie like a rug.
Lately, I've been insisting on USPS, who can't be bothered to do
more than leave a pick-up notice(except when I got stamps, & then
the genius left them, neither packaged nor labeled w/my name, just
sitting atop the mailboxes, where they rapidly evolved legs)--much
simpler to go get them myself from the PO.

Patrick says:
May 8, 2009 at 9:12 am

The only major trouble I had with any of the big three was when I
signed up with the local major monopoly phone company for DSL
Internet. They were supposed to send me the installation package,
but it never arrived. They said they showed it having been received
and signed for, but there was no indication where it was delivered. I
asked them to send another one, free of charge. They did, and when
it was delivered, there was a note on my apartment door indicating
that it was left at the main office of the apartment complex I lived
in. The first time there was no note, neither from UPS or from the
apartment complex main office.

When I worked in the satellite office close to home, I would sign for
most, if not all, deliveries from any of the three companies. I got
irritated with them giving the package to someone else and then
that person giving it to me, then me giving it to whoever it goes to
that I made a sign featuring the logos of UPS, Fed-Ex, and DHL to
bring all deliveries to me, third office on the left. It worked great.
The real reason why I did that was because I had ordered a lot of
stuff last year from Amazon, and I preferred them to deliver directly
to me, rather than give to someone else. I'm picky that way.
Huh. The front desk just called me, saying I had a BIG package delivered via UPS from Target. How in the heck am I going to fit this thing into my little Ford Focus? May have to borrow a company truck for the weekend. That, and find room in the little swatch of backyard we have. Looks like my weekend's cut out for me.
Amusing day, but not in the droll why-Oscar-you’ve-soiled-yourself-again sense. Amusing because of my own stupidity. I was dead tired last night, thanks to a short thin nap (ten minutes of quasi-sleep) and had a column and the Newsbreak copy to write. You ask: why are you writing the noon news for the next day the night before? Well, as the bouncy-happy guy who handles weather, sports and lite n’ brite C block, I figured I’d pimp the Trek movie, and this could be accomplished by reviewing all the predecessors. It was easily done – took longer to get screen grabs. Managed to work in some Klingon, too, and since I attended Klingon language camp, I had full faith in my pronunciation.

Well, I covered Klingon language camp for the Washington Post. Didn’t attend it.

Hmm: let me repeat that; I like the way that sounds. I covered Klingon language camp for the Washington Post. O hail me and my fascinating career. This was in ‘94, I think. I interviewed Marc Okrand, the creator of the language, too. The camp was in northern Minnesota, and I called him from my Great-Northern-like hotel, only to discover he lived a few blocks from me in Washington.

Anyway, I got to work, and everyone looked at me as if I wasn’t supposed to be there, because I wasn’t. I misread the schedule. Ah well. Did the bit anyway, and said that the Klingon reviewers of Star Trek 5 said ‘Oh, or “it
stinks.” It’s not pronounced like Oh – it’s sharp and short, way back in the throat. Like everything else in the Klingon language. Then off to write a column.

**Did so at home,** because the sprinkler guy was coming by to replace some parts. One of the smartest things I ever did when we bought Jasperwood was put in a sprinkler system. If you’re new to the Bleat, I should explain: Jasperwood is located on an absurdly large and useless lot. When this neighborhood was laid out in the 1880s they carved out huge lots for all the moneyed plutocrats who would escape the malarial city for its Elysian fields, but they never came – when the streetcar lines finally reached this suburban enclave, the lots were chopped up for smaller houses. However: this lot is steeply graded, and nothing can be built on 7/9ths of the land, so the house perches atop the lot. The original owner, a candy manufacturer who invented the Walnetto – I’m serious – bought the lot next door so he could have a nice garden. Consequently I have a ridiculous amount of land for a house in the city in this part of town. Ridiculous. When I lived in DC, my condo / apt was eventually sold from underneath me at a price comparable to what I paid for Jasperwood, and the back yard for that home consisted of an 8 X 8 concrete slab.

This is why I am here.

But the lawn is too vast to sprinkle, so I chomped down on the ruinous outlay and had a System put in A fellow comes by to tune it up in the spring; in the bare last days of fall, he comes to “blow it out” and shut it down. It’s the alpha and omega of the green season. Tonight when I drove home the lawn was glistening, and the sun caught drops of water hissing from the sprinklers. I have never regretted that expense.

Because I am too lazy to go outside and move the sprinkler every half hour every night. Which brings us to another matter.

**Yesterday** I wrote of the Lost Gazebo, a large box UPS somehow misplaced. As Majel Barrett used to say on the second part of a Star Trek double-episode story: And now the conclusion.

The gazebo did not arrive today. I knew it wouldn’t. I called the number “Christopher” had given me, and was not surprised to get a voice menu that did not include the option to press 7 for Christopher. I would have been suspicious if there had been such an option, because that would mean “Christopher” was only a name given to customer service reps who handled difficult cases. As in, someone sitting in the breakroom with other reps, saying “I’m on Christopher duty for the rest of the week, and then I’m Bob.” (Bob handles the screamers, and pretends he’s a manager.)

When I got through to a human being, I recounted my particulars: UPS had lost the package, UPS told me to call you, I did, Christopher put a trace on the item, and said if it didn’t show up today I should call, and you’d overnight it.

All this was news to THE SYSTEM, because the pertinent info hadn’t been
entered into THE SYSTEM, and hence . . . well, what? The customer-rep didn't know what to do, but said she'd talk to her manager. I was put on hold, where I listened to sprightly up-tempo music punctuated by a pre-recorded assurance that reminded me how important my call was. Not in the general sense, either, but important to them.

She returned and said they could cancel the gazebo order. They couldn't send a new one until May 11, because they had to wait to see if it was really lost. They couldn't upgrade the shipping to overnight.

"Is this what your manager said?" I asked. She said yes. I thanked her for her time and asked to speak to her manager.

I restated my case as simply as possible, although I admit I leaned a bit on the promised delivery dates, and noted that I had intended to use the gazebo for a particular event. (I had. It was called Saturday night at home in May.) I asked if this sort of delay was acceptable to Target, and whether they thought it should be accepted by its customers.

Calls may be monitored for quality control, remember. Always ask a calm question whose affirmative answer puts the company in a bad light.

She said she would send a new one out on the 11th, but they wouldn't charge me for shipping. I said that was perfectly fine and thanked her for a happy conclusion to our mutual disappointment.

Now. Back up a bit. This is the third gazebo. The first was wood, and lightweight – I manhandled it into the back of the old Honda CRV, broke it down when I got home and took it up the hill in pieces. The second gazebo was lighter, which is why I bought the third one. (The first good wind threw it across lawn.) The Third Gazebo, starring Orson Welles, is made of solid deutronium, which can repel full-force phaser fire. When I saw it at Target I realized there was no bloody way I’d fit it in the vehicle, let alone drag it out. So I hit upon the idea of using a can of coins I’d put in the basement to pay for the shipping cost. The coin-counting machine offered Amazon credit in lieu of a counting charge. I sign into Target.com using my Amazon account. Ergo, those coins from years ago, long discounted as an asset, could be converted into hired muscle that would transport the item up the stairs.

That sound weak? Lazy? Remember: THE HILL. The needless elevation of Jasperwood. Tonight a canvasser came up to get my signature for health-care petition, and he had to pause in mid-spiel because he was winded by the steps. Young man, too.

So the end result is the delivery of the gazebo at the top of the stairs at no additional cost. The coins, tossed in a jar between 2001 and 2003, will not be spent on shipping, but revert to my Amazon account, and be converted into books. I don’t blame UPS – these things happen – and I can only praise Target, for having a sensible manager who knows when to cleave the Gordian knot.

Qapla'!
Later: 100 Mysteries around noon, or so. This one's gruesome. See you then. Oh – column over at startribune.com (Scroll down, look for my mug; thanks)

40 RESPONSES TO friday! may 08

Peter I says:
May 8, 2009 at 12:40 am

Dude,
You've been 'UPSed'.
Same thing happened to me. It is your own genius plan that sunk you. You thought you'd get Brown to hump that thing up your stairs — but when your Brown saw it, he say 'fack it' and took it back. That's the 'inside job' you're intuiting — you just had the particulars wrong.

That's why they are asking you if you want to cancel the order.

They're trying to help a buddy driver out.

He don't wanna go up those stairs any more than you do.

(I won't bore you with my story, but it involves 25 cartons of 100 pound books from Armonk, New York to Topanga, CA…

Same principle.

You're a genius, by the way. And thanks for all your work.

Sincerely
Peter Russell

Joan H. says:
May 8, 2009 at 1:43 am

I, for one, am eagerly awaiting your opinion of the new Trek. Qapla’, indeed.

jenifersf says:
May 8, 2009 at 1:58 am

I was gonna say what Peter said.

JDB says:
May 8, 2009 at 2:23 am

Ah, yes, Ecclesiastes: “To everything there is a season…a time to tune up…a time to blow out.”

From the King James Version, I assume.

GardenStater says:
May 8, 2009 at 6:07 am

What a coincidence! I always begin my day with Lileks, then go to Mental Floss. And this morning, they link to this Slate article about Klingon: http://www.slate.com/id/2217815/
CRJ says:
May 8, 2009 at 6:16 am

At what point does it receive the title “Oak Island Gazebo”?

Deb_In_Madison says:
May 8, 2009 at 6:28 am

Sadly, I understand exactly what Qapla means without having to reference my Klingon dictionary.

hpoulter says:
May 8, 2009 at 6:33 am

The Bible is better in the original Klingon, of course.

Diane says:
May 8, 2009 at 7:29 am

I ordered furniture a number of years ago; the couch and chair were sent via a trucking firm, but for some reason, the ottoman was sent UPS.

I had to go through hell and back to get that thing. When the delivery was two days overdue, I called the vendor, who gave me the info to call UPS, who insisted they had tried to deliver it twice (I could prove they hadn’t), who then promised to deliver on a specific day. When it still did not show up, UPS then said they did not have it, I should contact the vendor…

You get the picture. It took four more calls, then my actual presence back at the store, insisting I was not going to pay the now non-sale price for a replacement for an ottoman I never received in the first place, along with a threat to return everything. The vendor did make it right, but I do think some UPS guy has a nice leather ottoman sitting in his living room that should be in mine.

FanBoy says:
May 8, 2009 at 7:29 am

Try using twitter to contact UPS. They have somebody on there to cut the red tape.

wiredog says:
May 8, 2009 at 7:30 am

Bob handles the screamers, and pretends he’s a manager.
So you got Bobbed…

I worked at the UPS sorting facility in Chantilly back in ’88 I will never ship anything delicate via UPS without insuring it. I know how those packages get handled.

A history of the Klingon Language: http://www.slate.com/id/2217815/

Doug says:
May 8, 2009 at 7:43 am

The Walnetto inventor also came up with Velveeta.
Or so sayeth the dead-eyed host of Food Network's “Unwrapped.”
HunkyBob says:
May 8, 2009 at 7:55 am

“Calls may be monitored for quality control, remember. Always ask a calm question whose affirmative answer puts the company in a bad light.” – Captain James T. Lileks, Starship Bleat

MRNUTTY says:
May 8, 2009 at 7:57 am

i bought one of these gazebos last year. I couldn’t get the ‘canvas’ cover completely off it for winter, as a result I have a fine strong metal structure supporting a twisted mass of ‘canvas support superstructure’.

NeeNee says:
May 8, 2009 at 8:54 am

James,
Just a heads up . . . when I clicked on “startribune” link at the end of your article, all kinds of nasty stuff popped up. Said I was infected, had a virus, etc.

I’m running a system scan, but apparently there’s something not kosher on the trib’s link.

hpoulter says:
May 8, 2009 at 9:01 am

While we are talking shipping horror – I had something shipped “by ship” about 10 years ago – a cubic meter container of pottery and objets d’art – really nice stuff from our vist to Thailand. It was about the time of a big currency crash and we didn’t hear anything for nine months. We decided we had been ripped off, and we would never see our treasures – but out of the blue, we got a call from the shipper in Chiang Mai telling us our cargo was still in Thailand, but he was working on it. We called back and forth for a couple of months (the 12-hour time difference and language difference made it fun). It finally almost came apart, because someone had lost the original “bill of lading” – a mystic and sacred document without which a shipment apparently ceases to exist. My wife finally broke down and cried during one of her conversations with the Thai shipper, which awakened his chivalry. He apparently called the freight depot in Bangkok that was holding us up and threatened to kneecap them, because we got a call that the stuff was on its way the very next day. After that and a few more weeks, we had to go down to a huge customs shed in Baltimore (think Raiders of the Lost Ark) and claim our now year-late shipment of treasures. I understand you can send things FedEx from there now. Wouldn’t be the same.

John Wright says:
May 8, 2009 at 9:39 am

Well, I’ve often wondered how these “salvage” businesses get their inventory. Sure, I understand that a certain amount of stuff is going to get “lost” in transit, but these places are sometimes as big as a WalMart. And often located in a former Wal Mart space but that’s another story. I’m sure your gazebo will turn up in the Outdoor section of some Discount Salvage operation next to a couple of Char-Broil gas grills and an electric Weedeater that’s missing its cord.
And, yeah, what Peter said in the first comment above.

Dr. Shrinker says:
May 8, 2009 at 9:54 am

The old “promise the moon one day and then the next day no one has any idea what the first guy was saying and there's no way they can do what he promised” trick seems to be the standard operating procedure in customer service these days. I have to deal with health insurance a lot (note the screen name) and this happens every single time I have a problem. The first person I speak to, let's call him “Christopher” (even though he ALWAYS has an Indian accent), promises a quick and sensible resolution to my problem. When weeks go by without that sensible resolution, I call back and not only does no one named Christopher work there, there's NO WAY they can do what he promised and can't even BELIEVE that he would have promised such a thing. Oh, and there's no record of me having ever called.

If Dante had known about telephone customer service he'd have added another level to hell just for them...

Stylinjulie says:
May 8, 2009 at 10:46 am

I so adore your writing. This one made me LOL:

As in, someone sitting in the breakroom with other reps, saying “I'm on Christopher duty for the rest of the week, and then I'm Bob.” (Bob handles the screamers, and pretends he's a manager.)

Thanks, I needed that.

swschrad says:
May 8, 2009 at 11:04 am

your gazebo is over a dented grill and mismatched table/chairs set in the back of a UPS office in Eagan, I am sure of it.

missing a ceiling bar.

with a large tire mark on the canvas.

something over 20 years ago, new to the cities, working at a computer applications company. we got half a UPS truckload of large, costly, and difficult to get CDC hard drives brought in.

all loaded higgledy-piggledy on the lift truck.

manager and I looked in the back of the truck and they were all over the floor.

refused the shipment.

Mr_Lilacs says:
May 8, 2009 at 11:07 am

Dr. Shrinker, I work for a hospital. I could use your services to have a particular physician shrunk. Barring that, maybe just reducing his ego to the size of, say, Wyoming.
swschrad says:
May 8, 2009 at 11:42 am

Mr. Lilacs, on behalf of the US Treasury Department, we would be happy to consider your request under the TARP program for additional funding for

shrinking doctor's ego

but act quickly while we still have over $160 billion dollars available for loan. you propose an incredibly expensive endeavor.

RLR says:
May 8, 2009 at 11:47 am

Hey Mr. Plutocrat Hill Dweller! I bet Jasperwood looks a lot like Toshiro Mifune's house in _High And Low_. Great flick, BTW.

imdbcom/title/tt0057565/

juanito - John Davey says:
May 8, 2009 at 12:26 pm

Dr. Shrinker Says:
May 8th, 2009 at 9:54 am

Dr. Shrinker, Dr. Shrinker, he's a madman with an evil mind.
Dr. Shrinker, Dr. Shrinker, he's as crazy as you'll ever find.
Crashed upon the doctor's isle
Shrinkies are shrunken by laser ray
Will they always be so small?
Will they be lucky and get away?
Dr. Shrinker, Dr. Shrinker,
he's a madman with an evil mind.
Dr. Shrinker, Dr. Shrinker, he's as crazy as you'll ever find.
Dr. Shrinker!

Read all about it! here-http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr._Shrinker

Billy Barty and Jeff MacKay – how could it not be a hit?

"I chase the Shrinkies. I catch the Shrinkies. The Shrinkies escape. It's a vicious cycle and it's driving me mad!" Only one season and it didn't do too much for my well being either…

Brian Greenberg says:
May 8, 2009 at 12:32 pm

I, for one, look forward to the May 12th Bleat, in which James informs us that the Gazebo has once again failed to arrive, and that the manager he spoke to today has run off with Christopher to start their own salvage operation in an abandoned Wall Mart.

roger h (bgbear) says:
May 8, 2009 at 12:33 pm

How about the “Music Box” with Laurel and Hardy. That is what I think about when James speaks of Jasperwood and deliveries.

One of the funniest short films ever (you can find the video on line) and the walkway up the hill still exists in LA county, you can see it on Google maps.
Conny says:
May 8, 2009 at 12:39 pm

Brian Greenberg's comment (above) is cracking me up! I LOVE tales of Jasperwood; keep 'em coming. Please do let us know if the gazebo arrives on the 12th.

Chris M says:
May 8, 2009 at 1:03 pm

My parents named me Christopher. I hope you won't hold that against me. I had one of those target gazebos for a few months one summer. It was a $100 special, which still came to like $10/pound. It looked solid, but was built more like an ultralight aircraft. Unfortunately, I had set it up near the side of my house where the wind is channeled and accelerated between the neighbor's house and mine. One good wind storm and it was a twisted wreck. Even the 80# of bricks I had stacked at each corner wasn't enough to hold it down.

I'm too cheap for a sprinkler system. My alpha and omega is the launching and unlaunching of my little 15' sailboat. It's usually November before I take it out though. The water is like 45F by then, and I end up numb from the waste down. I force my kids to go out on the boat at least once each year:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTIa6MIEF1g

juanito - John Davey says:
May 8, 2009 at 1:12 pm

My yard is the opposite: on a hill that drops to a little canyon with a creek behind my fence, that goes straight back up to a 300 ft hill. The Street drops down about 7 – 8 feet to the house (the driveway is pretty steep). The house sits on another hill, then about 20 feet out to a 15 foot drop, and then the biggest part of the lot drops about 3 feet over about a 120 foot run. Moving things down the hill: no big deal. Moving things back up? Haven't done it in 14 years. Seriously, we were thinking about getting some more large landscape boulders for the “down below” as our little ones call it. I might contract with a helicopter service from Cameron Park Airport which is one hill top over to drop them in the yard.

Travis says:
May 8, 2009 at 1:28 pm

And still no diner.

The famine continues...

roger h (bgbear) says:
May 8, 2009 at 1:44 pm

We once had a piano moved from mother-in-laws house to our new rental house. My brother-in-law made the call and my wife and I really had little to do with negotiating the price.

After finishing, the guy in charge of the two man team came back and whined that he should get more money because no one told them there would be stairs.

The “stairs” are exactly two steps that raise from the drive way to
the walkway leading to the house. Kind of odd, if piano moving were easy, no one would hire movers.

**Bridey** says:
May 8, 2009 at 2:21 pm

I'm in UPS Heck too right now, having discovered — 10 days after placing an online order — that the $13 I paid to get a weensy box shipped via UPS instead of USPS entitled me to only the “third class bulk” variation.

I had never heard of that flavor of UPS and still don't know what it means, except that my stuff has vanished into an untrackable void, whence it may emerge at some date unpredictable and as yet unforeseen.

This is the vendor's fault, of course — this whole “bulk” business was not specified at checkout, or I would've skipped the whole thing. There are limits even for one accustomed to paying insane catalog S&H.

But I do empathize with shipping woes. UPS won't or can't track this for me, but perhaps I could ask them if they have a very small box in the Eagan facility, sitting next to what looks like a gazebo.

**GardenStater** says:
May 8, 2009 at 2:23 pm

Still no Black and White World, either. Come on, it's a boring Friday afternoon at the office!

**Ed Singel** says:
May 8, 2009 at 3:31 pm

Due to modern shipment tracking and the internets, it is now possible to follow your shipment as it gets lost. Last year I ordered some software on CD. I was able to track its progress from its shipment from the East coast, all the way to about 30 miles from my house in California, then back through Texas to its ultimate delivery in South Carolina(?). This was the USPS, whose response was essentially “huh?”. The vendor, via a nice guy in India, made good, but I took delivery by download.

**AnnaN** says:
May 8, 2009 at 4:10 pm

“So the end result is the delivery of the gazebo at the top of the stairs at no additional cost. The coins, tossed in a jar between 2001 and 2003, will not be spent on shipping, but revert to my Amazon account, and be converted into books.”

Hahahahaha! Windows XP tells me it is only May 8. Oh you silly unhatched chicken counter, you.

On a serious note (really) good luck with that. 😆

**Mike Kriskey** says:
May 8, 2009 at 4:44 pm

Deep, infrequent watering is the key to developing a healthy root system, James. Make them REACH for the water.
cnyguy says:
May 8, 2009 at 7:19 pm

I wonder if our host has ever considered the possibility of having a permanent (and, one would hope, sturdy) gazebo constructed at Jasperwood. It would undoubtedly require the outlay of a fairly sizable stack of currency, but it might be worth the expense. It’s obvious how much Mr. Lileks enjoys the gazebo, and I’ve read his many tales of frustration and annoyance about the temporary ones he’s installed over the years. Maybe I’m just thinking of all the material for future Bleat installments that the design and construction of a permanent Jasperwood gazebo would provide. What fascinating reading it would make for all of us Bleat fanatics…

Shaky Barnes says:
May 9, 2009 at 12:06 am

Your reference to being able to sign in to Target using the Amazon username was news to me. So I check it out and find this priceless bit writing:
“Selections from Target.com and Amazon.com are available on Target.com, which is powered by Amazon.com.”

Who Am Us Anyway says:
May 9, 2009 at 12:18 am

“The Third Gazebo, starring Orson Welles.” 😊

Peter Katt says:
May 9, 2009 at 11:51 pm

Can it be you’ve never seen the Glenn Ford/Debbie Reynolds movie “The Gazebo”? A classic dark comedy about a TV writer trying to outsmart a blackmailer. The wonderful character actor John McGiver played a handyman who mispronounced it “gaze-bo”.

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Thanks for dropping by!
Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later.

Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
I remember seeing “Purple Rain” when it first hit the screens, and feeling very proud Minneapolis was so hip. Also felt quite remote from the mythical uber-sextastic world it portrayed, even though Prince was my size, my age, and I’d served him Pigs in a Blanket when he sat in my section at the Valli. (It sounded so naughty when he ordered it.) Ah, to go back a quarter century, tap my self on the shoulder and say -

Well, no. Back up.

If you’ve been to one of those high-buck memorabilia stores, you’ve seen the framed albums with band-member signatures. A thousand dollars buys you an ersatz Bon Jovi gold-record kit; ten grand gets you the guitar just like the one played by some briefly-famous pop star, and it has a hastily scribbled signature. (You look at the Sharpie squiggle and wonder if that translated into the monthly gardener’s bill, or money still owed on rehab, child support, an hour in Lethe.) So it took me a while to realize that my host didn’t have a framed gold record for The Time because he liked the group; he had it because he was in the group.

But it was my night be very, very slow to realize things. I have no idea why, but the ability to put names, bands, eras, and history together complete eluded me for a while. But let’s back up again.

Friday night I’m sitting in the living room of a nice house on a leafy street on the edge of a southern suburb. Light spring rain; twilight. The first thing I
noticed upon entering was the grand piano, miked up, with the cords running into the baseboard. Since most houses aren’t wired thus, I figured the cords went to the recording studio in the basement. That’s why we were here, after all: daughter was going to play her original piano composition for posterity along with some other kids, and our host, who knew Natalie’s piano teacher, had offered his house and studio for the evening. Teacher had said the entire family was musical, including the grand doyenne of the clan.

Can’t mistake her when she arrives. Elegant, gracious, a quick smile. She sits down; my wife struck up conversation, and they got to talking about the kids, as moms are wont to do. All her children were in music:

“One of my sons on tour with Steve Miller now. My daughter is with – who’s she with?” She turns around to find her son, but he’s tuning his bass. “Bonnie, Bonnie Raitt. Yes. And my other son is with Kenny Loggins.”

Our host, Paul, is tuning his bass; he will be joining the Loggins tour soon as well.

If Natalie is nervous, she’s not showing it. This was part of a midwest music festival – you could play someone else’s piece, or enter your own composition. Over a thousand kids played something someone else wrote; seven decided to write their own. As Natalie would later explain with blunt honesty, she chose to write her own “because I didn’t want to do the other thing. Also because I like composition.” We’ve been working on this composition for a few months, and this was the night when the kids would record it for posterity. The original plan was to record the pieces at the host’s other place, formerly Flight Tyme – Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis’ joint – but he decided to have it at his house instead. And so we came to be in the home of a kind, friendly fellow without a jot of pretense or Mr. Rock Star Ego. Great kids, cute dogs, lovely funny spouse – you’d call him lucky, but that would discount what he’d done to earn it.

It’s time to begin. They decide to go youngest to oldest, and ask Natalie’s classmate how old she is.

“Eight.”

“Natalie?”

“Eight and a half.”

Get that kid on the Price is Right. The first girl does a lovely job on her own piece; Natalie does well too. We’d been drilling the hard parts, but she plays the baby grand without any nerves or hesitation. (I am temporarily forbidden to post it, since she is still mad I posted part of her story the other day.) The older kids are stunningly good – the host’s daughter and son, both high schoolers, played their own compositions, and they had an effortless, offhandedly perfect quality that made you wonder when they’ll find the exact gene in charge of Music.

When the kids are done and the trophies handed out, our host’s mother says
she'd like to play. She doesn't have anything in mind; let's just see what happens. She walks over to the bench with her cane, leads it against the piano, and begins.

Well.

Ladies and gentlemen, Jeanne Peterson. There are two women in the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame. The other is Judy Garland.

The first cut is dreamy and a bit bittersweet – soul music for the Greatest Generation. Remember: nighttime, dim room, rain on the porch.

Then she played a piece with her son. Uptempo. *I suspect they've played together a few times before.*

Background: she was staff pianist & vocalist for WCCO for over two decades, organist for the Twins, local nightclub performer. (If I'd known that last fact at the time I would have asked her about nightclubs in Minneapolis, because that is a book that has to be written.) Here's a lovely song set to some stills:

By the way, here's Mrs. P playing with that Kenny Loggins fellow at the same house. She's 87. Naturally, she has a website.
Today: Matchbook Museum, and one other tidbit. A weekend post below might pique your attention. Buzz.mn explores the fictional 1939 Mpls Centennial.

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43 RESPONSES TO *monday, may 11*

**jenifersf** says:
May 11, 2009 at 1:00 am

Wow. Very sweet, very wonderful. (Go on, post Natalie's. Sneak it up somewhere she won't see. I won't tell.)

**Louise Hunter** says:
May 11, 2009 at 1:13 am

What a sweet experience to have. Music tends to cascade down families. It's one of those invisible ties that bind. What a pleasure and a privilege to witness talent of this kind passed down through the generations. Beautiful

**GardenStater** says:
May 11, 2009 at 5:13 am

I wish I could have been at that party. That lady just sounds amazing.

(And I've always wished I could play piano, even half as well as she does. What a gift.)
Juan Paxety says:
May 11, 2009 at 5:25 am

Speaking of Minneapolis night clubs, Larry Munson, who gained fame as the football play-by-plan announcer for The University of Georgia is originally from the Twin Cities and played piano and sang in night clubs there before WWII.

Kim says:
May 11, 2009 at 6:24 am

Maybe it's just technical difficulties on my end (my Firefox curled up and napping?) but I'm assuming there's video or audio embedded in this post that I'm just not able to see or hear. There's an inch or so of blank space between each of the last few sentences re: Ms. Peterson, but whatever's supposed to be in those blank spaces isn't showing up. *insert downward-sliding, brassy horn sound of disappointment here.*

Ron Moses says:
May 11, 2009 at 6:46 am

As enchanting a tale as this is, I can barely contain my disappointment at the lack of a Trek review. 😞

Jeff says:
May 11, 2009 at 6:50 am

So she didn't play “I'm Alright”?

Patrick says:
May 11, 2009 at 6:53 am

That's awesome to be in the company of people who have toured with such greats like Steve Miller and Kenny Loggins. A friend of mine's cousin toured (don't know if he still does, need to call and find out) with Fleetwood Mac, as their sound engineer.

Banned in Boston says:
May 11, 2009 at 7:27 am

Thank you so much for sharing those recordings. I never had the pleasure of listening to Jeanne Peterson play before. Hearing it was a wonderful way to start the day.

Nancy says:
May 11, 2009 at 7:38 am

Ron Moses Says: “I can barely contain my disappointment at the lack of a Trek review.”

LOL—Just when my eyes were glazing over (I like Trek to a point) the focus changes. That is why this is such a good read. Why, it's a box of chocolates!

hpoulter says:
May 11, 2009 at 7:53 am
What an experience – a good one for Natalie, too – to see a life lived with music.

Jeff says:
May 11, 2009 at 8:17 am

Not just to see a life lived with music… but to see that outstanding musicians can be real people. You don’t have to be weird or have an ego that barely fits through a garage door. I work with a number of musicians, and the most impressive are also the most ordinary.

Hooray for Natalie!

Stoutcat says:
May 11, 2009 at 8:27 am

Oh my, how lovely was that! The first piece you embedded had (to me) a flavor of the Vince Guaraldi Charlie Brown Christmas music; don’t know why, it just did.

As for the rest, well, what is there to say. Talent can strike deep, and surely did in the Peterson family. Thanks you for sharing those.

And I’m still eager to hear Natalie's piece, when she’s ready to share it.

boblipton says:
May 11, 2009 at 8:30 am

Some lovely, lush Jerome Kern today and I am particularly enamored of the renditions of ‘All the Things You Are’.

Here’s hoping that Natalie lifts her ban on her performance appearing here.

Bob

Dianna says:
May 11, 2009 at 8:38 am

Thanks, James, for transporting me to this dream world, if ever so briefly. How wonderful it would have been to actually BE in the room when this grande dame was entertaining! Took me back to the days of my parents parties…always someone playing the piano, people gathered 'round, singing, dancing, cocktail in hand. (maybe a cigarette, too) In the pictures, they all looked so happy! And perfectly coiffed. The tailored suits and ties, the ladies all dressed in impeccably fitted party dresses, wasp waisted too, all Lance and Lori-ish. Back when muffin tops didn’t mean overhanging flesh! Ahhh, those were the days, if only on the surface.

LindaY says:
May 11, 2009 at 8:43 am

I suppose if my dad had posted a bit of the stories I wrote when I was Natalie's age I would have been embarrassed and mad at him, too. But please tell her what I saw I thought was very well-written and I enjoyed it.
Drew says:
May 11, 2009 at 8:43 am

The day started out terrible — cranky kid with a high fever, and I burned the eggs while trying to coax her into taking her medicine (we're still working on that one) — and then I read this and listened to that first, perfect piece. Improv you say? I wish for a world filled with such improv!

I think I need to just put that on repeat and have it running all day. Everything would turn out well.

Drew says:
May 11, 2009 at 8:45 am

Decided to spin some Django Reinhardt, and repeat it until the CD player has a blunted laser.

Deb_In_Madison says:
May 11, 2009 at 9:34 am

Thank you for posting all of this, James. It has made my life infinitely better.

Chris M says:
May 11, 2009 at 9:35 am

Wow! Nice Piano. I was inspired back in '06 and bought my kids a Yamaha Keyboard for Christmas. My 8 year old daughter liked it, and has taken lessons for almost 2 years now. I think she has a knack for it. She played a little song for the 1st – 4th grade talent show. She did get some nerves, and flubbed in a few places. The school's weird, old, electric piano thing might have thrown her off too. She's played it perfectly in practice at home. For her next recital, she will play “Blue Danube”. Or at least the first two pages of it. I like that she gets to play some real songs now, instead of just piano lesson book songs. I have noticed that the Yamaha (fake) piano has much lighter keys than a real one. I really need to find us a real piano. On the plus side, the Yamaha never goes out of tune.

Baby M says:
May 11, 2009 at 9:41 am

Amazing music. Just amazing. I'm in the lounge at a swank club, it's 1956, there's a cocktail on the table before me and a Packard in the parking lot and all is right with the world.

Baby M says:
May 11, 2009 at 9:47 am

One more thing: in comparison to this, the Artist Formerly Known as “The Artist Formerly Known as Prince” is a hack, unworthy to turn the pages on this woman's sheet music (if she needed sheet music in the first place, which she obviously does not).

rob barrett says:
May 11, 2009 at 9:53 am

Beauty, what will stay and what will fade.
Hangers on walls
with scribbling and all
memories of past
reflect the beautiful now
and that which will follow.
That which is real
what time can't steal
and make dust
separating our trust
from what is hard
and what is fragile,
what will leave
and what will remain.

Thanks to the Peterson's for years of what will remain.

DavelnAz says:
May 11, 2009 at 10:11 am

Wow. Thank you, James, for sharing what must have been an
absolutely perfect evening! I recognize her and her work, and have
emailed the link to a number of friends. I'm positive that I heard her
in some Mpls club years ago and requested some ancient song,
though I can't remember what it might have been.

Those of us who know people like her are truly blessed.

Wish I had asked Morris Day and the band to sign the album cover
for “What Time Is It?” Five of the clocks on the cover were mine.
Wish I had pictures of Prince and me playing Asteroids at the local
strip joint. (He was really good.)

Wish I’d stop dropping names. That was a past life, and I was only
lucky to be there.

But the love of really great music is still infective in the lives of our
family. I was fortunate enough to shake the hand of Hershey Felder
this weekend. (Google him, friends, and if you have the opportunity,
find a performance in your city.)

Meanwhile, I'll be playing that first cut from the Bleat all day long. It
was simply lovely.

Stoutcat says:
May 11, 2009 at 10:25 am

Ding! Ding! Ding! We have a winner! What Baby M said at 9:47.

Mark B. says:
May 11, 2009 at 10:29 am

James, Jeanne is a national treasure and she's obviously been a
monumental influence to people across the entire spectrum in the
music world. Jeff Lorber; Joe Sample; George Benson; Phil Ramone;
Dave Koz; David Sanborn; Kenny Loggins; Bonnie Raitt; Steve Miller
et.al. And of course her kids. Woman casts a mighty long shadow.

If Natalie's serious about her music, you could do a heck of a lot
worse than launching her into Ms. Peterson's orbit.

’Berg
juanito - John Davey says:
May 11, 2009 at 10:32 am

The day started out terrible — cranky kid with a high fever, and I burned the eggs while trying to coax her into taking her medicine (we're still working on that one)

That high fever stuff is teh suq. 4 year old had it Thurs – Sat and missed T-ball, then the 7 year old comes home from 9 hours of Girl Scout Amusement Park fun with the same high fever and sobbing. Up all night (all night) sleeping on her floor as she bellows at the injustice of it all, and now I'm trying to make sense of a new T1 circuit – curse you AT&T! Forces are aligning against me!

Drew hope you daughter feels better!

James, that was on enchanted evening, and certain to remain special in Natalie's memory in the future.

swschrad says:
May 11, 2009 at 11:16 am

an excellent adventure! exposure, not to mention immersion, in the arts on an intimate level is a wonderful thing for a young child. while Mr. Glyph operates on a high level borrowed from some other universe, and thence only occasionally fits well into this one, you are finding excellent teachers and role models.

-0-

juanito, all you should have to do is get the router set right. the carrier needs to insure the T1 is correct to the csu/dsu. if they can't run zeroes, T1daly, and 4F to a CSU loop, they're not done.

Travis says:
May 11, 2009 at 11:59 am

Drat.

It's bad enough I get the butterflies over my own kid's performances, now I get it for yours too.

It's amazing how many incredible talents there are out there that you just stumble into. Your life really is like the Diner.

Speaking of which...

juanito - John Davey says:
May 11, 2009 at 12:33 pm

swschrad Says:
May 11th, 2009 at 11:16 am
juanito, all you should have to do is get the router set right. the carrier needs to insure the T1 is correct to the csu/dsu. if they can't run zeroes, T1daly, and 4F to a CSU loop, they're not done.

It's all AT&T – circuit was scheduled for turn up and testing last week, and I've got a slew of public facing DNS updates to complete, but AT&T mishabled the circuit ID (by duplicating it!!!) and can't be bothered to pull their thumbs out and correct it. Say – did you know that there are multiple levels of Case Escalation Managers at AT&T?
You would think that there'd be just one, but alas there are about 4.

It's a managed router (in case I am hit by a bus… or jump in front of one) but I've already configured it – its set wide open, as I'll use my own Linux routers behind it, using public IP assigned to us from the pool for the new circuit. This could have been finished up last week, in a day, but look what bureaucracy gets you! an extra 6 days! Weeeeeeeeee!

Garry says:
May 11, 2009 at 2:17 pm

@juanito & swschrad:
I love it when you talk dirty…. you had me at “new T1 circuit”

juanito - John Davey says:
May 11, 2009 at 2:45 pm

Garry Says:
May 11th, 2009 at 2:17 pm

@juanito & swschrad:
I love it when you talk dirty…. you had me at “new T1 circuit”

T1 is sooooo old school.

Now, DS3 or SONET, well I might get the vapors.

Bandwidth is pure gluttony.


Kevin says:
May 11, 2009 at 4:30 pm

Actually, I thought The Onion had a brilliant review of the “Star Trek” film (are we allowed to post links to that site?):
http://www.theonion.com/content/video/trekkies_bash_new_star_trek_film?utm_source=a-section

Teach5 says:
May 11, 2009 at 6:41 pm

How awesome for all involved! Natalie got to play the piano of a great, classical talent, and to be in her company as well! Ms. Peterson sounds very much like Marian McPartland-terrific stuff-thanks!

Tom in Clareville says:
May 11, 2009 at 10:40 pm

I am guessing that there must have been some music and photos. Sadly, because I can’t access this until I get home in the evening, it is now gone. I wish you could keep it available a little longer. Must have been interesting.

T. Marcell says:
May 12, 2009 at 1:51 am

James, Stoutcat,
I think that first, beautiful, piece by Jeanne Peterson is “But
Beautiful" by Bill Evans or at least, half Evans-half Peterson.

That tune, in a dimly-lit room at twilight, full of friends on a rainy night, that is what I imagine Limbo is like...so, far, I don't dare imagine any farther.

hpoulter says:
May 12, 2009 at 10:45 am

Tom in Clareville – must be your browser. The music is still there.

The music widgets and embedded youtube players all use Adobe Flash.

Randamuko says:
May 12, 2009 at 3:10 pm

At my former place of employment's "Holiday" party last year they invited Jeanne Peterson and her daughter to provide the entertainment.

It was horrifying. The daughter can sing but probably shouldn't, at least not for money, and Jeanne...well she was an amazing pianist but the singing...oh god the singing. It reminded me of being surrounded by old ladies at church wailing hymns.

Add this to them both spending more time talking about how many people they know and who they hobnob with and how important they (excuse me their family members) are then they did actually entertaining. I'm sure she has a reason for being in the hall of music, but man...they couldn't finish fast enough.

J.R. says:
May 12, 2009 at 9:59 pm


JC says:
May 13, 2009 at 12:25 pm

Just saw Bonnie Raitt last night. Ricky Peterson was fantastic on keyboard and vocals.

Carole Hampton says:
May 14, 2009 at 1:10 pm

I am so honored to be a part of the circle of friends of the PETERSON clan

Patty says:
May 14, 2009 at 11:55 pm

James, I love that you were able to hear Jeanne Arland and experience her. She is amazing and a true Minnesota treasure. Thank you for taking the time to acknowledge this artist for who she is... a woman of depth, love for her family and grateful to have used her gift of music all her life to touch people's hearts. Some may say they don't get her, or her family, but that is okay. Most do understand and love them. May you keep bringing these kinds of
stories to people. I will take this over shock media any day. Thanks!

Lileks says:
May 15, 2009 at 12:20 am

Considering the source, I'm honored. 😊 Thanks for the visit – and keep up the amazing work you do.
Well, you knew this was coming.
Okay? No spoilers here, but I imply things. You’re warned. First impressions:

1. Of the two movies that feature a bald angry Romulan driving a spiky gargantuan spacecraft to destroy earth, it’s the best.

2. Engineering should not look like a waste-treatment plant. Engineering should look like Engineering, with a big throbbing warp core with lights that go up and down and catwalks all around it, because if there aren’t any catwalks there’s nothing from which people can be catapulted, screaming, when the ship is attacked.

3. I had a pot of coffee before I went, and the fluids asserted their needs to be released during the Juvie-Kirk-Steals-A-Car sequence, and I was grateful for that. Kids stealing a Mustang in the 24th century while listening to 20th century rock is like someone stealing a Prius today and CRANKIN’ UP THE SCARLATTI.
4. Nimoy needs stronger Fixadent.

5. The fine Starfleet tradition of staffing their biggest, most modern ships with people who just graduated from school yesterday – or this morning, or not at all – appears to have started early on.

6. The script writers had the phrase “Kirk is choked” on a macro key.

7. The presence of the Orion women would seem a shameless bid to get Starfleet Academy in Playboy’s annual survey of Party Schools.

8. John Murtha’s descendants, at some point, obviously move to Iowa.

9. I’m sure there’s a reason the USS Kelvin’s shuttlecrafts have shower curtains for doors, but I’m unclear. Must be self-sealing transparent aluminum. Or IKEA.

And a few other points. Bottom line: Loved it. Loved it, loved it. O I loved it. Except for the moments not seen because I was out on the aforementioned errand, I loved it all. The opening was just a big shovel of chocolate for the fans - been a while since you saw something with NCC on the hull fire phasers and get hit with torpedos and generally blow the hell up, eh? Here. On the house. And it’s emotional, too – thus was Odysseus born!

When it switches to Kirk in a bar in Iowa getting pounded as a townie, I figured someone would step in and shout “stop, men! That’s James Kirk, incognito, top of his class at the academy, due to ship out tomorrow on the Farragut! “But no: he’s hanging around being Val Kilmer lite. And I thought: well, I do wonder if any other liberties will be taken.

A few.

Good. I’m not a purist; it would be a ridiculous thing to be. A purist would have to worry about things like starships with vector-graphics on their displays. A purist would have to live with things like Worf having an opinion about Cole Porter. I think DS9 is better than TNG, overall, the last season of Enterprise was as good as Trek got, and Voyager was often better than people remember in the latter years, even though the entire show squandered the opportunities of its premise. It did have one interesting two-parter about a man who prowls through timeon a giant spaceship destroying planets, but that’s neither here nor nor there.

No, this wasn’t for purists. This was the effort of some talented people who got the original idea at the subatomic level, and said “It’s ours now. Here we go.” Let’s look at the characters.

Spock: different. He has seething pains instead of Nimoy’s glacial cool. It’s not the original Spock, but I’ve seen enough cold Vulcans. “Enterprise” did a nice job of shading their one-dimensional character – no really, stop laughing – and now your standard issue Tuvok-style Vulcan looks like a chess-club dork who’s really happy to suppress emotion because it means everyone has an equal shot at the chicks.
Sulu: I can imagine the actor thinking “What did Takei do? Right: the occasional sly smile. Well, I’m not going to do that. This is serious thing. I am Serious Sulu.” I liked him.

Chekov: Can we bring back Wesley Crusher and not make you hate him? Yes We Can! A very endearing take on a character who was, let’s admit, a Beatle-Commie. Or maybe a Monkee-Commie. Chekov was always the guy who waved his hands at what he saw on the console and couldn’t figure it out, and that was the end of it, keptin; this Chevok looks at the readouts and figures it out, his mind racing ahead of itself. (Note to starship designers: for GOD’S SAKE, figure out a way to transfer transporter control to the bridge. TRUST ME. It will come up again.)

Uhuru: Oh my. Ditch Ms. Nichol’s velvety star-stenographer routine, dress her up fine – *these boots were made for establishing a subspace channel, and that’s not all they’ll do* - and give her a hint of romance that really turned canon upside down and said HA HA to the purists. Loved her.

Scotty: Let’s be frank. Simon Pegg was playing Simon Pegg. He is not the master chameleon Doohan was. He changed the character completely; Scotty is no longer the man married to his engines who relaxes with technical manuals. He needs another movie to make the role his own.

McCoy: Urban was the only one channeling the original character, and I suspect some found that jarring. When he sat down in the shuttlecraft, hungover, unshaven, rattling off the possible disasters, the resemblance was uncanny, as if DeForrest Kelley had done a quick pre-death mind-transfer. *Remember. Also, imitate.* I loved his performance, and it never took me out of the movie.

Kirk: I think I have the least to say about him, because he made the most of the opportunity to remodel the character without changing it. If he didn’t seem Kirk-like to some, it’s a reminder of how much Shatner’s performance hinged - on *mannerisms*, the abrupt! Gesture. There was one perfect moment when he nailed Shatner-as-Kirk, though: walking on to the bridge at the end of the movie. They must have loved that in the rushes, and it makes you wonder how much more he could have done. It was wise not to do more.

On a side note: for heaven’s sake, they should have given him the opportunity to note that his hacking of the Kobyashi Maru test was exactly the sort of skill-set a Starfleet captain needs. “Okay, I’ve taken the test twice. Did it once, got blown up. Did it again, tried the other obvious thing, got blown up. Noted. Are you saying a Starship captain should not consider using stolen all-Empire access codes to trick the enemy vessels into thinking nine false sensor readings aren’t incoming Federation ships? C’mon.”

The plot? Yes, there was one. Excellent Bad Guy – perhaps the first blue-collar nemesis in Trek. I think his motivation might have flagged after 10, 15 years, but don’t judge a man until you’ve walked a mile in his big, Kirk-kicking boots.
It wrapped up fast, which was welcome. I hate movies that drag the final cataclysm on and on, but when this was done, it was done. Then it was one final piece of chocolate for the fans – Pike, in a wheelchair! Yes! – before curtain call. All the characters in place, everyone stepping into the shades of their predecessors, staring into a bright new future that you can be damned sure will have a sequel, possibly going up against Iron Man 3 or maybe an X-Men Origins tale, but, really, Cyclops? Who the hell cares about him? Jerk.

Then the voice over; then the theme, and it’s like they emptied an entire can of Reddi-Whip on the entire cake. You’re ten again, and you can’t possibly be happier.

Except I’m not ten; I’m a middle-aged man, for heaven’s sake. But when I was a child I saw the first episode of Star Trek ever broadcast, at my Grandfather’s farm house, in living color, and I’ve loved it ever since. It would be pathetic to say this meant something to me, but I’m sorry: It would be a lie to say it didn’t.

One more thing, in true Comic-Book Guy fashion:


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121 RESPONSES TO Tuesday, May 12: the inevitable review

**Whalehead King** says:
May 12, 2009 at 7:18 pm

I hated the movie but I loved the characters. When they were interacting, I knew I was in the right theater. Too much skittery action and movement to fill up screen time for me not offering information. Vicarious swerving. When the characters were talking and being themselves, I was there. When the ‘plot’ was being played out, I was ready to leave, but I stayed. You give a good review centered on the characters. I think they deserve better than this script or treatment gave them. This won’t be a rental years from now. I’ve seen it once and that is enough. Total enjoyment: 20 minutes. I know I am in the minority.

**Kim** says:
May 12, 2009 at 7:42 pm

Just got back from viewing #2 – even better the second time around, and this time I wasn’t the only Trekker with tissues! : D

**Teri** says:
May 12, 2009 at 8:07 pm

grg-I did. I wept at the opening scene. They had me at the first scene. I watched the movie, went and got a cuppa, then bought another ticket and saw it again. I’ve never done that before in my
life. So, Mr. Lileks-I hope you feel comforted by the knowledge that-in whatever funny farm we all end up in, you won't be alone.

Rich Cox says:
May 12, 2009 at 9:14 pm

So lets put it this way. A good foundation, and being an odd number episode, will mean even better things to come?

Origin movies have created a pretty good franchise. It is what you do with it in the follow-up that matters.

SomeGuy says:
May 12, 2009 at 10:43 pm

I didn't read all the comments, so my apologies if this has already been mentioned. While it is dumb that Kirk listens to 20th century music, it may have been an inside joke, given the song that he was listening to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlOTRxt-dIw&feature=player_embedded

Ross says:
May 13, 2009 at 1:05 am

“I'm hoping Budweiser will have been driven out of business by real beer by the 23rd century.”
Amen. That swill is a stain on the original brewer's name.
Just once, couldn't somebody have equated delinquent cool with something other than rap? I am _so_ tired of that pseudo-music invading every soundtrack.

Dave (in MA) says:
May 13, 2009 at 1:30 am

It's so cute when Trekkies call themselves Trekkers.

Diane says:
May 13, 2009 at 9:10 am

90210 and One Tree Hill meet SNL parodies. Okay if that's all you got from Gene Rodenberry's creation, but otherwise a complete travesty. Not a purist, but not surprised when hearing J. J. Abrams doesn't even like any previous Star Trek series or movies and hasn't really watched them. It shows. Two plus hours of painful boredom and disappointment. Unfortunately Abrams will be doing a sequel.

curegirl0421 says:
May 13, 2009 at 10:41 am

I loved it, start to finish. And yes, best redshirt ever... my daughter, uninitiated, didn't understand why I winced at Away-Team Member #3 in all his ruby glory. I knew he was toast.

I can't wait for a sequel! I have never said that ever, not even with Iron Man.

Dan Holway says:
May 13, 2009 at 4:16 pm
Wesley Crusher enjoyed it:
http://wilwheaton.typepad.com/wwdnbackup/2009/05/if-all-reboots-were-done-this-well-we-geeks-would-never-worry-about-reboots.html

**Teri says:**
May 13, 2009 at 9:07 pm

Almost as funny as Mr. Lileks review-but not quite of course-is the review by The Onion. Check it out if you haven’t seen it.
Gosh it feels good to laugh-doesn’t it guys? I mean, I feel that since November-I just haven’t. Everything is so freaking serious. WHY are they picking on Cheerios now? Is nothing sacred??
OK-I need to go back to the movies.

**DryOwlTacos says:**
May 13, 2009 at 11:02 pm

Best. Trek. Ever! May the franchise live long, and prospering seems inevitable.

**Below The Beltway » Blog Archive » (More Than) Four Words On The New Star Trek** says:
May 15, 2009 at 9:06 am

[...] there are reviews from James Lileks and Stephen Green, which I agree with completely, and Will Collier points out the reason why J.J. [...]  

**Jason says:**
May 15, 2009 at 10:43 am

The hole in Iowa is a limestone rock quarry. You know, much of concrete is made out of is limestone. It has to come from somewhere. The only thing is, they would need some pretty massive wells to keep the groundwater from filling in the hole. Or maybe they just installed a super slurry wall around the site, I guess it might be possible with 23rd century technology.

**Urban Forager says:**
May 15, 2009 at 1:36 pm

“5. The fine Starfleet tradition of staffing their biggest, most modern ships with people who just graduated from school yesterday – or this morning, or not at all – appears to have started early on.”

Yeah but…(frantically waving hand in air)…you gotta remember that the Federation were at war with the Klingons at this point (in this reality too), so the cadets were all that were available to man those recently built or recently retrofitted ships. The Federation were simply grabbing every warm body they could, no matter that they were mere students.

My ultimate all-time favorite character from this movie? McCoy. Oh my yes. Uncanny is the word.

And yeah, that was the Best. Redshirt. Ever. “Oh hey, look! It's Ensign Toast!”
Gunslinger says:
May 15, 2009 at 8:32 pm

Isn't the big trench in Iowa the result of the attack from the aliens in the third season of “Enterprise”? That would be yet another nod to the tv canon.

Lileks says:
May 15, 2009 at 11:01 pm

That. Would. Be. AWESOME.

M Gubbins says:
May 16, 2009 at 1:18 am

Great review, James! Just saw the movie tonight, and was sighing in satisfaction at that sweeping shot of the Enterprise…

Just a note on Scarlatti: point taken. But isn't it more like a kid today stealing a horse and humming the theme from “The Magnificent Seven”? It's not so much the time passed that matters, as much as what he associates with car-stealin’. (I do hope they have a few new tunes by the 23rd c. though.)

I very much enjoyed thinking of the Romulan intrusion into the plot as representatives of all the junk that was poured into the Star Trek universe by people who didn't care much for the spirit of the show. That at least explains why they shoot rather than run at the end… revenge!

Fred says:
May 16, 2009 at 3:31 pm

“This isn’t your father's Capt. Kirk. Literally from the moment of his birth, his life has been different than the Shatner version's. He's the same guy, but with a different upbringing that was really only hinted at in the car-chase scene.”

I wonder if the changes induced by the time traveling will be used in the butterfly flapping its wings in the rainforest sense to explain why the Federation knows so much about Romulans when in the original series it wasn't until late in the game that the common ancestry of the Romulans and Vulcans was known…

Definitely the doors are open for everything we've ever known to be true to no longer be true…

USS Montcalm says:
May 18, 2009 at 10:33 am

I was prepared to hate, but came away loving it. McCoy, my favorite in the old series, was my favorite again here.

I realized that this movie emphasized why I enjoyed the original series and could never really stand TNG. These were humans, with human feelings, and friendships and hatreds. TNG characters were all soulless goodie-two-shoes. The robot (“Mr.” Data) was the most interesting, for gosh sake. You know the only thing played over the TNG Enterprise on-board radio is NPR, with occasional breaks for diversity and sensitivity training. Can you imagine a TNG prequel? A little bald, prissy Picard skipping down the boulevard? Picard trying to talk up a girl (any girl) in a bar? Would anyone pay to see it? Ick!
Thank God no one said “Make it so.”

**richardmac** says:
May 18, 2009 at 10:44 pm

Yet another lone voice in the crowd – Agree with Diane. This movie could’ve been way better. Kirk, who never lost a fight in the original five year mission, gets his ass kicked in every fight in the entire movie just about. Spock, um, can’t mention without spoiling, but it was BS. HUGE holes in the plot. Kirk's promotion was totally fake, the plot itself sucked and was totally fake. It's as if it was written by a group of 12 year olds. The acting was very good, the opening was very good. Destroying the time line was worthy of Rick Berman, and I mean that in a bad way. Star Trek's quality died with Gene. Major disappointment.
This is an excellent week. Star Trek on Monday, the Bennett-Prager-Hewitt speech on Tuesday night, prefaced by an hour on the air before a crowded room that didn't hear a word we said. Best kind of live audience! The illusion of popularity without contrary evidence! It's like an echo chamber where everyone else just nods: cool. While Hugh was interviewing other guests I sat at the table with all the people who'd paid to sit with the host, and did my best to fill in. Never filled in for a guy who was supposed to be eating steak with people who had paid to watch him eat steak. But they knew he wouldn't be at the table much, so their dismay at having to deal with me was muted in advance. Met Bill Bennett; fine fellow. Gave Prager grief. Talked with old friends and met a few new ones: capital time.

Had to leave the hall early. Took this shot on the way out:
I had a few minutes today to change my phone service – the new phones turned out not to have an answering machine, but merely a Voicemail button. Silly me; oldthink. It’s meant to “interface,” as they say, with the phone company’s voice mail. So I cancelled a service I never use – I think it allowed me to forward auto-warranty pitches directly to the White House – and added voice mail. Then the upselling began.

The customer service rep asked if I was happy with my cell phone; I said I had an iPhone, and he said well, that’s the end of that question. How about your internet?

Ah. Well: when I signed up for a new ISP, I was stunned at the low-low price, but soon learned it did not include, what’s the word, internet. That was provided by Qwest. I took the deal, thinking Qwest might offer a lower rate down the road – and they did. Doubled my speed and cut five bucks off the price. There was an amusing moment where the rep started explaining things in very simple terms, and I slung a little lingo to let him know I wasn’t new to the game, son. Whereupon he upped his lingo level slightly past mine. I pretended to follow along. For all I know neither of us knew what we were talking about.

Big news: in the fall, we get fiber. Two-billion terabytes per nanosecond, or something like that. I said “Wow, I could download a cracked version of Vista in just a few minutes.”

I wanted to hear the definition of a non-committal customer-assuaging laugh, and I did. Reassured him I wouldn’t. Just kidding.

Then I fell asleep. Ka-boom, out. I think the word “NAP” is perfect for what it describes, but it should be more flexible; a NAP is a short one, self contained, but a nnnnap is one that takes a while to achieve. A naaaaap is perfect; a nnnnnnap is too long. A nappp is one that requires multiple
alarms to get you up. (I set the computer in the next room to beep very, very loudly; it goes off once a minute if not slapped.) As I also said on Twitter, I didn’t know if the nap paid back the night before or was borrowed from the night to come. When I have to get up early to make the NewsBreak huddle, I usually work on 5.5 hours of sleep, so I have to fall unconscious around four to make the rest of the day possible. But now I’m wide staring. Good thing: novel work ahead.

Oh: someone asked if I would repeat my list of 25 summer books. Hewitt sprung this on me today, asked for a reading list. I made it simple: 1 – 12 would be novels and story collections by Steve Saylor, from his historical detective novels set in Rome. Numbers 13-25 would be anything by Michael Connally.

So: Could the day be any better? Yes: Generalissimo, Hugh’s producer, played Happy Robots (Uniblab Mix) as bumper music today. So a day where you can do TV on the web, have your song played on the radio, talk on the same medium, meet some interesting folk AND upgrade your internet speed is pretty much a winner all around. There’s something else, but it’ll keep until tomorrow.

Earlier today, waiting to have lunch with HH at his hotel, I wrote the following.

Sitting in a hotel lobby, waiting for a lunch appointment. It’s the Millennium Hotel, but I’ll always think of it as the Holiday Inn. It was built around the time the Nicollet Mall went up, and had a nice swank late-60s vibe for a while. They kept the green-black marble when the rehabbed it, and it’s cut in the style of the times. I seem to remember more floating staircases with gold handrails, though. Last time I was here I was getting ready to be the Grandmaster of the Holidazzle Christmas parade down the Mall. Natalie came along, waving to the crowd. She’s forgotten it now, I’m sure. Well, fine; she seems to lack my belief that remembering is more important than experiencing. Sometimes I think I’d be content just to remember things that happened to others; saves time and carfare.

This is the middle of a very long day. Have a dinner and a speech to attend tonight, so this may be the only chance I get to type something. Have to make due with a photo-loaded Bleat, I guess. Some shots of the Mall in Spring.

The obligatory sunken plaza, frequented mostly by smokers and ducks. I call it Craplaza:
I don’t know why this is here; half a block away there’s a block-long sunken park that’s much more inviting. This looks like a version they made for petty criminals.

The building above is an unfortunate piece of 80s glass, ill-suited to its surroundings – looks like a chunk of the IDS Center fell off and was pushed south by glaciers.
The style of architecture might as well be called the Solipsist School; the buildings know only themselves.

The ghastly anti-human YWCA building, with its lovely concrete bunker-fragment contrasting with the Target building:

Perhaps more people in the future will wonder why American architects decided that the land of the free / home of the brave should have buildings that looked like something Tito would approve.
Next door, one of the few survivors of the pre-war era in this end of downtown – the old Continental Hotel. The tree next door looks like one of those irritating people who strikes up a conversation and leans close and breathes denture breath and won’t stop talking.

Finally, a statue outside Westminster Church:
Sums up my mood today, except I had more clothes on.

**LATER:** the ever-popular out-of-context ad challenge; Miscreant Round-Up at buzz.mn, and a Mpls update of substantial size. Here are your links for the authors mentioned above – by all means, offer other recommendations for good smart series in the comments. See you soon.

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**30 RESPONSES TO *wednesday, may 13***

**bgates** says:
May 13, 2009 at 2:20 am

*A napp is one that requires multiple alarms to get you up.*

I think that should be the kind old guys with prostate problems have. Because of the excessive ‘p’.

**RB** says:
May 13, 2009 at 4:01 am
Tuesday comic cover?

crossdotcurve says:
May 13, 2009 at 5:43 am

Ah, Hugh Hewitt. Mr. Hewitt recently posted a conversation he had with someone named John Mark Reynolds on “how to make new young conservatives”:

http://hughhewitt.townhall.com/blog/g/343b2913-3e95-4f6f-9165-d9e99aa94bd

Turns out, Mr. Reynolds is a young-earth creationist. Scroll down to the “inside this book” section and click on “read the first page”:

http://www.amazon.com/Three-Creation-Evolution-Porter-Moreland/dp/0310220173/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1242210860&sr=1-1

Yes, Mr. Hewitt. That’s the ticket. The kids are clamoring to hear about how the planet is 6000 years old. And those “dinosaur bones” are…um…well…oof. You see Adam and Eve sprung fully formed from the mind of God. Yep. mmm-hmmm.

Janet says:
May 13, 2009 at 5:45 am

There’s a few of us out here who would not have been disappointed to share a steak with you in lieu of Hugh. Believe it or not, James, I was thinking about going to the Bennett-Hewitt-Medved speech here in Philadelphia so I could ask Hugh Hewitt to sign YOUR name in his book. I figured that would be the closest I could get seeing you on a book tour.

Faithful reader for more years than I care to admit

Greg Zywicki says:
May 13, 2009 at 6:08 am

You know, the bad cars of the mid to late 80’s you can blame on the adoption of computer design tools, as well as the move to unibody construction. I don’t think the architecture people can lay the same claims. I suspect Drugs were involved. Either straight lines were all they could do while high on pot, or they seemed SO AMAZINGLY BRILLIANT! while coked-up.

gingeroni says:
May 13, 2009 at 6:24 am

Great. Now I have another author to check out. 😊 I already have 1-8 of Saylor’s work. Guess I need to catch up on what he’s written lately.

exgeeeye says:
May 13, 2009 at 6:44 am

Tsk, James– don’t you know, smokers ARE petty criminals…at least until the Powers get a round tuit about adding it to the ever-growing list of felonies.
Raintree says:
May 13, 2009 at 6:59 am

I work in one of those concrete bunker buildings. Every time I walk up to the main entrance, I feel like I am on the set of Fahrenheit 451 or other dystopian movie.

Mumblix Grumph says:
May 13, 2009 at 7:41 am

Sums up my mood today, except I had more clothes on.

Er… I hope you also missed out on the hand-poking-out-of-the-kiester aspect of the statue.

John says:
May 13, 2009 at 7:43 am

You can’t say enough bad things about bad architecture – there isn’t time or toner cartridges enough. But the swipe at Tito was, I think, a little unfair. I’m sure it was meant as a generic dictator-with-awful-taste reference. But the actual ex-Yugosaviac doesn’t look that bad. On my very first visit I did something I almost never do, which is take a camera: I had plans to photograph horrible buildings and statuary. How could I go wrong? But I had to abandon the mission. The place looked pretty good! Though they would be unfamiliar to most Americans, the most potently nasty architectural references come from south of the border. Latin America, lacking ecologists, turns over its people-hating to architects. Lucio Costa, one of the designers of Brasilia, was an ardent Communist plus he never even visited the city: ‘nuff said.

Duane says:
May 13, 2009 at 8:31 am

I also recommend Stephen Saylor’s Roma Sub Rosa novels. Following Gordianus the Finder on his investigations has not only been entertaining, but has offered some interesting insights into Roman life. Sadly politics is not much different today than in ancient Rome, though perhaps we see fewer bloodstained togas these days.

Speaking of ancient Rome, I also recommend Pompeii and Imperium by Robert Harris. In fact, all of Harris’s books (Fatherland, Enigma, etc) are great reading.

Normie says:
May 13, 2009 at 9:29 am

James, thanks to your previous writings, I decided to try the Roma Sub Rosa series and have happily devoured over half of the set; will probably finish the rest in the next few weeks. Luckily, our local library system has all of them available.

Saylor cracks me up with his injections of modern detective show elements: During questioning, his subjects are certain of the exact time something occurred because they “had just looked at the sundial” in the garden/stableyard/behind the temple, etc.

And now here comes Duane to lure me down the path of yet another intriguing author…
huddydrvr says:
May 13, 2009 at 9:34 am

Good series: I have a 60 minute drive each way to work, so have been using my Audible account to purchase audiobooks to make the drive tolerable. A series I enjoyed LISTENING to (but have never cracked a page on) was the “Deep Black” series by Stephen Coonts and Jim DeFelice. (The last book in the series was “coauthored” by a different person, and IMHO, stinks). However, the first 7 books were quite entertaining. Good spy stuff plus lots of gadgets and shooting.

RebeccaH says:
May 13, 2009 at 9:38 am

As it happens, I’m reading Steven Saylor’s Roman Sub Rosa series now. They’re fascinating to say the least. On your recommendation, I’ll have to sample Michael Connally next.

Lileks says:
May 13, 2009 at 9:59 am

Be that as it may, Mr. Hewitt is not a young-earth creationist.

flashman says:
May 13, 2009 at 10:55 am

I especially enjoy the pics of Minneapolis. I usually get there once or twice a year and usually stay at the Hyatt or the Millenium. Haven’t visited yet this year, so it’s nice to see the downtown. I presume you’ve read some of CJ Sansom’s Matthew Shardlake mysteries set during the reign of Henry VIII – they fit right in with the Showtime series.

Nancy says:
May 13, 2009 at 11:13 am

I hope I am wrong but in every image I have found of the statue “Birth of Freedom” the figures appear to be frozen in some sort of post-immolation agony. Sort of Pompeian after the volcano. Maybe the effect is different in “real life”. I also guessed correctly the era of creation as being the seventies judging by the incredibly accurate and pronounced rendering of the-er-genitalia! I guess my art-school critique would be “good example of technique and mastery of materials.”

Patrick McClure says:
May 13, 2009 at 11:19 am

“All have to make due with a photo-loaded Bleat, I guess.”-J. Lileks, 05/13/09

Nit pick of the day- it’s “make do”. Of course when a minor misspelling is all we have to complain about it’s a good day.

Glenn says:
May 13, 2009 at 11:29 am

So the Roman Sub Rosa series being mentioned here is similar in concept to the Cadfael series?
DaveInAz says:
May 13, 2009 at 11:41 am
My brother just send me a picture of himself with our fine host, Mr Lileks, taken last night. Cool.

PJ/Maryland says:
May 13, 2009 at 12:07 pm
Glenn, the Roman Sub Rosa series is set in first century BC Rome. It's a bit more urban than the Cadfael series (set in 12th century England), and oddly seems more modern. I don't know enough to tell if that means both authors are accurately describing their separate milieus, or if Ellis Peters is better at capturing Cadfael's era than Saylor is. (Or maybe it's just me.)

Another historical mystery series I've found interesting is Roger the Chapman, a series by Kate Sedley. (Though I thought the most recent, The Dance of Death, quite disappointing.) Roger is a traveling peddler in 15th century England; he lives in Bristol but travels to London in several stories. In some books, he helps the Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), and we see some aspects of politics and the broader world.

JC says:
May 13, 2009 at 12:19 pm
It's Connelly, not Connally.

Baby M says:
May 13, 2009 at 12:33 pm
For reading, I'd recommend Eric Flint's “1632″ series of alternate-universe SF novels and (showing my age) Roger Zelazny's “Amber” books.

For your iPod listening pleasure, may I suggest the “Adventures of Ruby” radio dramas from ZBS—especially the first series. Film noir hard-boiled detective in space—with giant moles and death rays!

Aleta says:
May 13, 2009 at 3:09 pm
“1632″ YES! YES!! Excellent book and series, including the fan fiction, “The Grantville Gazette.” But for Ancient Roman mysteries, I prefer the “SPQR” series by John Maddox Roberts. Good mysteries, excellent recreation of the time, uncomfortably close to events here and now. Start with “The King's Gambit” and you'll be hooked. BTW, according to John, his SPQR books sell better in Germany than America. Odd.

JMHawkins says:
May 13, 2009 at 3:09 pm
I'd suggest the Aubrey-Maturin novels by Patrick O'Brien. Set in the early 1800's generally aboard a Royal Navy ship, they're remarkable books. Plot? Who needs a plot when you've got great characters. Star Trek fans will probably see a little of the Kirk-Spock relationship in Captain Aubrey and Doctor Maturin too.
Or any of the Ross MacDonald Lew Archer books. Especially if you're taking a trip to Southern California.

Jimmy says:
May 13, 2009 at 5:09 pm

Super Post! We're all glad when you're glad...

Mike says:
May 13, 2009 at 5:15 pm

I work in this example of solipsistic architecture. The “craplaza” exists for two reasons: to provide work for the maintenance staff, and to leak on the cars below.

Mark E. says:
May 14, 2009 at 2:33 pm

Here in DC we've just had a flash of rationality with regard to preservation; the city is going to allow the demolition of the Christian Science Church on 16th St.

http://tinyurl.com/rdb4j6

Shelley says:
May 14, 2009 at 6:08 pm

What on earth did you say to Dennis? I would have happily shared a table with you. My husband always says that you would make one hell of a party guest.

I really need to get on the ball. Whenever Hewitt or Prager are giving a talk, I always manage to miss getting tickets for it. The last talk in L.A. was sold out.

Will Sampson says:
May 16, 2009 at 11:47 pm

A few years ago, I was a service rep for a company that involved travelling to a few American cities. Top 3 in terms of buildings:
1. Philadelphia
2. Chicago
3. New York

I hated Houston… …the buildings that is. And I don’t remember any LA buildings… Funny

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Archives
All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
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I dreamed I was on a ship, watching people launch strange boats over the side. Seemed rather haphazard: they just shoved them off, and expected them to land right-side up. “Go ahead,” they said. “It’s easy.” So I put a passenger in the red boat and gave it a shove, fell about 50 feet, watched the prow hit the water and take the boat and the passenger with it. To make things more embarrassing, this was taking place in my backyard, which had become a deep, deep lake. I swam to the back door and sat down and waited for the laughter to subside, thinking: when they realize I drowned someone, they’re going to be mad. But they weren’t. Then the dream turned into “The Andromeda Strain,” except the Wildfire base was a hotel. I don’t remember if check-in took three days.

Did not really wake up until eleven or so. Sludgy head all morn. I worked until I remembered that the gazebo was supposed to arrive today, and it hadn’t. Checked the web to see the status of my order.

There is an exception.

Since that’s the subject of the Friday column, I’ll have to leave it at that for the moment, but if you were following on Twitter you got the blow-by-blow...
account of the entire sorry affair. Which leaves me with little to do here, except . . .

Well, I didn’t publish the Mpls update yesterday, because I forgot. Sorry: I plum forgot. Also, I haven’t had the time to write the money update, so that’ll be late. Big deal. When I start charging, you can complain. 😊 One thing I managed to do was digitize a few tapes, because I can roll those while I do something else. As noted a while ago, with rue, I am redigitizing all my old tapes, because maybe Natalie would like to have all the raw footage instead of the stuff I snipped for the home movies and edited to show me at my best. (Who knew the wife had the camera running when I tried to burn down the neighbor’s garage?) I do one tape per day. Some day I’ll recut them, but not anytime soon. I’m surprised at how craptacular the video appears; we’re so used to HD now that standard old videocamera quality looks like a cave painting. Here’s a still from 1997:

The sign, of course, is gone. For that matter the strip mall it heralded with such sixties brio is gone. It wasn’t much; the grand “Dale” suffix, used in the distant Twin Cities to connote a truly major mall, seems to have been appended without fear of legal injunctions. I believe it had a Piggly Wiggly – he’s wiggly because he’s squirming in mortal terror, and that means savings for you! – and the usual drug-store / hardware-store / Tandy combination, with a bar. The Lamplight? I think so. The sign probably came down around the time I took the picture – there’s still a grocery store, but the strip mall’s gone.

As is the mall across the street. Fargo and Moorhead share a unique distinction for cities their size: each demolished an early indoor shopping mall. The Moorhead example had the town’s first Target, but it emptied out and perished after West Acres was built. Towards the end it was an antique
store and a flea market. The Fargo mall arrived in the mid-70s and was built on the north side of town, complete with a big grocery store. Opened fully leased, but it too expired. Everything it offered could probably be found at Northport, another strip mall about ten blocks to the south. You could not dynamite the shopping patterns of the locals, even if you gave them a new place with soft Muzak and indoor plants. If I recall correctly, though, the walls were made of that horrible unfinished poured-concrete aggregate, the sort of substance that would draw blood if you brushed against it with sufficient force. Like many malls that have the stink of death about them, people stopped coming, even though it had many stores. The sad bored expressions of the clerks was just too much to bear. Eventually everyone stopped pretending. It closed, and was later subsumed into a housing development, like mammoth bones ground under a glacier.

The grocery store died, because no one took on Hornbacher’s. No one. They had automatic doors before anyone else, and they had bar-code scanners in the early 70s. I thought the place was the NASA of grocery stores.

This was their sign:

Isn’t that the coolest name for a shopping center? Northport. By the way, I think we had a Piggly Wiggly on the north side as well, although this isn’t it; if
I read my early Fargo phone books right – and I challenge any man who suggests I don’t – this was the store at 724 North University.

When you're a kid it's almost impossible not to conflate Wiggly with Porky, but you know they're not the same. They might be related; Wigster went into the butcher's trade, apparently, and Pork apparently took up some sort of law, or accountancy.

Busy day ahead – we're live-to-tape on NewsBreak now, which is more work. Column to write. And so on. But! Lance Lawson is up now at buzz.mn, and the late Minneapolis update is here. It's the library, past and present. And also past.

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!
between the Wigg Pig and their own Porky.

On the subject of dead malls, Phoenix surprisingly had a large number of malls for a city of its size during the 60s and 70s (the Phx metro area didn’t hit 1 million until the early 70s)-most of which have been knocked down and replaced with big-box centers or empty lots.

Baby M says:
May 14, 2009 at 5:40 am

I always thought the name “Piggly Wiggly” would have been mildly embarrassing to the firm’s executive level employees. How’d you like to have to identify yourself as the Comptroller or Vice President of Data processing or Director of Southeast Region Marketing (or some equally impressive title) for . . . um . . . er . . . Piggly Wiggly.

I remember a Bleat from some years ago describing some meat processor’s porcine mascot as a “quisling pig.” Piggly Wiggly is the ultimate quisling pig, don’t you think?

Deb_In_Madison says:
May 14, 2009 at 6:21 am

We love to sing the Piggly Wiggly theme song when it plays on radio or television. You can change the second line to your liking.
“Piggly Wiggly, EAT THE PIG!”

Jim T says:
May 14, 2009 at 6:46 am

>When I start charging, you can complain.

Foreshadowing?

ajtooley says:
May 14, 2009 at 7:31 am


rivlax says:
May 14, 2009 at 7:31 am

The post reminded me of my son’s first-ever naughty joke. He was about six at the time. He asked if I’d heard that Dolly Parton had bought Piggly Wiggly, Harris Teeter (a grocery chain in the Carolinas) and Big Lots and had renamed the chain Big Wiggly Teeters.

Kevin says:
May 14, 2009 at 7:44 am

I think the bar in the Brookdale Mall was called the Zodiac. As I recall, it closed in the late 70’s or early 80’s after the owner and his wife were arrested for trafficking in mood altering substances that their liquor license did not in fact cover. The Lamplight was on the south end of the Holiday Mall. Odd name, that one. “The Holiday Mall…? That closed. It was only open on holidays…..”
Kevin says:
May 14, 2009 at 7:46 am

oh, and I forgot my favorite substitute for the name “Piggly Wiggly”.
The Wobbly Hog.

luvndbison says:
May 14, 2009 at 7:56 am

You are right about the Sunmart that took the place of Piggly Wiggly. It was the Zodiac, also. Simon's Furniture used to take up most of the original mall. The Brookdale mall (minus the sign) is still there, though. Right now it has a Verizon, liquor store, Hollywood Video, and a Papa Murphy's. The store that used to be in the Holiday Mall was Tempo, not Target (remember Tempo Toycland?) It did turn into a Target prototype after Tempo. The store eventually became our original Best Buy. The Holiday mall also had the Lamplighter, Puffe's jewelry, a Coast to Coast, Foss Drug, Ben Franklin, a branch of Northport Clothiers, Speigels, and King's Food Host with their yummy Cheese Frenchees, which eventually became Sher's Kitchen. Then, of course, they built the New and Improved version of the Holiday Mall which stands mostly empty.

HunkyBob says:
May 14, 2009 at 7:57 am

I agree Northport has a good ring to it. Is the Red River of the north navigable? If it is not, it seems like an odd name to use in the upper midwest. Kind of like naming something “mountain view” in the middle of the Kansas plains.

HunkyBob says:
May 14, 2009 at 8:00 am

When I think of Piggly Wiggly, for some reason I'm reminded of that jingle for Red Wigglers from WKRP in Cincinnati – “The Cadillac of worms!” Don't know why. Makes no sense, apart from the “wiggling” thing.

Kevin says:
May 14, 2009 at 8:08 am

“Is the Red River of the north navigable?” Well, yes, if you have the time. It has so many bends and oxbows that the 75 miles between Fargo and Grand Forks is probably two or three times that distance via the Red.

rivlax says:
May 14, 2009 at 8:45 am

My dad always called it the Hoggly Woggly.

Azrael Brown says:
May 14, 2009 at 8:52 am

Holiday Mall was also the first location of the Best Buy in town; after they built a new building out by West Acres, that was about the death blow for Holiday. There was a Piggly Wiggly in the mall out by Trollwood – I remember going there quite often in my youth. The grocery store at 7th and University, now a Sunmart, is my primary
grocery store – its size and layout really feel like the 1960s; the newer grocery stores have a walmarty size to them that makes you decide you really didn't need to get bread since it would be such a long ways to walk to get there. We have, however, heard the employees refer to this Sunmart as “Slum-mart”, since it's not well cared for, even though (or because) it's the only grocery store within a mile or two from downtown (Hornbacher's in Moorhead is about the closest).

Baby M says:
May 14, 2009 at 9:04 am

HunkyBob: “I agree Northport has a good ring to it. Is the Red River of the north navigable? If it is not, it seems like an odd name to use in the upper midwest.”

Not far from me, there's the town of Peninsula. It's not on a peninsula. It's not even near any significant body of water. It’s totally landlocked. Nice town, but the name makes no sense at all.

When I was very little, I lived on a street called Lakeview. You guessed it–no lake anywhere close to it.

Go figure.

DaveInAz says:
May 14, 2009 at 9:25 am

Been following Tweets on the gazebo. I fear tomorrow's column. It should be grand.

The name Piggly Wiggly (with which I am familiar, having shopped there) mystifies me. I would have loved to be in the conference room where the creatives and corporates ran that up the flagpole. What were the alternatives?? Cowy Wowwy?? Steaky Quaky? Spammy Whammy?

The mind bobble wobbles.

Kevin says:
May 14, 2009 at 9:42 am


juanito - John Davey says:
May 14, 2009 at 10:00 am

When I start charging, you can complain

As a decade plus reader, are there going to be senior discounts available?

And sir, after such a lengthy association, I fear that you are emotionally charging already. Vacations, Holidays, and later than normal postings keep me an emotional wreck. It's starting to impact my family life. I, I, I don't know where to turn...

The nerve of our host! Having a life outside the one he details within these digital walls. I mean, really...

In all honesty, I thank you now, for the decade plus of free content. I will be first in line as a paying subscriber when the delivery model changes.
roger h (bgbear) says:
May 14, 2009 at 10:24 am

I seem to remember reading that Piggly Wiggly was one of the first fully self-service grocery stores and that they invented the shopping cart. I stand by my memory and am not going to Wikipedia.

😊

G. Martini says:
May 14, 2009 at 10:25 am

It's been a couple of years since I've done any shopping in FM, but I remember Hornbachers in Moorhead as having the “best. bread. ever”. I especially liked their Cambodian rolls. Never seen them anywhere else. Actually, the “best. bagels. ever” were from the European Bakery in Duluth which, sadly, closed recently after more than ninety years in business.

swschrad says:
May 14, 2009 at 10:41 am

wasn't Northport in the early 60s, about the time of the Harry Howland pool on the north side? Howland was in 61, I think. there are exercise club pools larger than that today, but the heater worked in Howland. it never did during my time of going to Island Park pool.

I ran across an old Piggly Wiggly ad on somebody's web site a few years ago, they were also the first to have a nationalized Standard Store Layout. it was subject of ads around WWII in magazines, they boasted about how you could find everything in the same place, in every store.

didn't look like much in the paper, but the place was probably packed top to bottom like the old Dahl's SuperValu on the south side. the size of a really good Gas 'N' Grab type store today.

swschrad says:
May 14, 2009 at 10:44 am

oh, Gazebos From Hell. bet if you poked a finger and wrote in blood, you'd get it the next day, with free on-site assembly. Amazon Logistics apparently can't handle anything larger than a book or CD.

at this point, what I'd do, cancel the order and hit the order desk at menards. you'll have to cut your own pieces, but it will be on time and it's a fine excuse to get some dandy power tools.

no self-respecting guy should turn down a chance to get some more dandy power tools.

JimBO says:
May 14, 2009 at 11:35 am

Ah, yes, my favorite Piggly-Wiggly. Or, in our vernacular of the eighties, the Wobbly Hog. Shopped there quite a bit during my early 80's sojourn in Fargo. Lived just around the corner and about 3 or blocks down the street (to the west). Real close to the rail yards, where BN chose to change boxcars around 2:00 am pretty much every night. Must say that I was mighty glad to move out of that part
of town. Also drove me to spend a lot of nights at my girlfriend's house in West Fargo.

Ah! Those were THE days!

Kevin says:
May 14, 2009 at 11:45 am

Going to have to disagree with swschrad, Harry Howland pool was never heated. Just thinking about it induces “shrinkage” to this very day. Made a jockstrap about as useful as nipples on men. As for Piggly Wiggly, from Wikipedia “The concept of the “self-serving store” was patented by Simmons in 1917. Customers at Piggly Wiggly entered the store through a turnstile and walked through four aisles to view the store’s 605 items sold in packages and organized into departments.” 605 items? I'm pretty sure my local Hornbachers has that many varieties of mustard now….

Normie says:
May 14, 2009 at 12:08 pm

So what's the difference between “wiggling” and “wriggling”? Besides the “r”, I mean.

writeaway says:
May 14, 2009 at 12:59 pm

So what's the difference between “wiggling” and “wriggling”? Besides the “r”, I mean.

I think there's more of a bend to you when you wriggle.

Crabtree says:
May 14, 2009 at 1:18 pm

Kevin, from this day forward I'm going to refer to the Piggly Wiggly mascot pig as D.T. Swine.

Nixmom says:
May 14, 2009 at 1:30 pm

@BabyM (5:40am post)

There's a company in the near-NW suburbs of Minneapolis called “Mello Smello”. (http://www.mellosmelloic.com/) I've always wondered if the people who work there are embarrassed when asked where they work. And if one were the CEO of such an organization, wouldn't one be strongly tempted to change the company's name?

Gina says:
May 14, 2009 at 2:11 pm

Dreams are so weird. I dreamed last night that I was giving a guest lecture on “A Tale of Two Cities” to a high school class, and doing such a bad job at it that they made me do it over and over again. (I've probably been spending too much time working on the project at my link above.)
Chris M says:
May 14, 2009 at 2:58 pm

“Northport” is pretty cool. “Earthport” would have been the coolest ever (as in the Cordwainer Smith story).

Tory Mitchell says:
May 14, 2009 at 7:21 pm

I am not even going to check my copy to make sure...doesn’t Mr Lileks mention, at the beginning of the Gallery of Regrettable Food, that the welcome wagon lady mentions the Northport Shopping Center when she came to his house that fateful day ‘way back when and brought his family the very first regrettable food material? I might be wrong, oh well. Northport does sound cool. Greetings, all, from the Pacific Northwest!

CC says:
May 15, 2009 at 12:02 pm

Dear James, I like St. Paul better than Minneapolis. Could you please take the years, nay, decades worth of work on Fargo and Minneapolis and do something similar and equally expansive for St. Paul?

Thank you. Take your time, I won’t be back at work until Monday. And thank you for the endless hours of enjoyment you’ve given me while at work.

Kev says:
May 16, 2009 at 1:31 pm

*My dad always called it the Hoggly Woggly.*

There was a Hoggly Woggly in Florida for a while, evidently designed for the sole purpose of competing with the Pig.

Josh R says:
May 17, 2009 at 10:07 pm

These days we in the library field refer to the middle central library as “Old Gold” and “The Aztec bus depot”

Just in case you were wondering.

DanO says:
June 3, 2009 at 11:19 pm

I grew up near Brookdale and have great memories of its glory days in the late 60s and early 70s. It was close enough I could easily ride there on my little red and white Scwhinn Skipper to the Foster Drug store and buy a fudge sickle that were always so cold they would freeze fast to your tongue on the first lick. Went to school with the son of the Mr. Simon who ran the Simon's Furniture store. Have since wondered if they were part of the Simon family that now runs Simon properties, the biggest mall company in the country, Watched with dismay as the mall fell into disrepair in the 80s and 90s. It's pretty rock'n again these days with Sunmart as the anchor where the old Piggly Wiggly used to be. Bought a fudge sickle there the other day. It wasn't exceptionally cold.
Thursday was one long scrape, but fun: we're now going live-to-tape for NewsBreak. That means we shoot it at the same time the graphics and transitions are added, which means all the cues and camera angles have to be written into the technical shooting script. It's like they've built a TV station in a corner of the office in three months. It's great fun, and gives me yet another use for my iPhone: using the built-in stopwatch to time my scripts.

Since this week is the shakedown cruise, there were hitches and bugs, but the overall product can be judged here. I'm the second anchor, as usual.

Took until one. Then wrote the gazebo column, with the gazebo delivered while I was writing it. News! As It happens! When I set it off I was done for the day, and since Natalie was off with friend to a movie – guess which one – I decided to run to the store to get groceries. I provide some needless examples of products that are not as necessary as their manufacturers may believe.

No. No:

No. Oh, it may be delicious, but it's like “Syrup Salsa” or “Honeyed Tomatoes” – for me they just don’t work together as a concept. This brand features lots of unusual combos, though, and I fear Goat Cheese – Taco is down the road, along with Mesquite / Peanut Butter.

When I saw this, I thought it was the elusive white chocolate syrup I had
desired all these years. Alas.

_Cupcake is not a flavor._

While I was in the store I checked the Twitter thing, because it had been at least seven minutes since I'd done so. YOU HAVE 100 NEW MESSAGES. One was from a fellow who wanted to know if I'd seen the new Spirit movie, and I said that I love the original comic so much I refuse to admit the movie exists.

Now: you may think it's the height of modern silliness to be walking around a grocery store typing with one thumb an opinion about a movie about a comic character from the 40s, and you may well be right. But something struck me an hour later as I laid down for a nap: I remembered being 20 and feeling the predominate emotion of moody English majors who lived in a rooming house. _Loneliness._ I don't think I've felt lonely since they invented the internet.

It's a false sense of company, I know – when I called the Twitter feed a portable box of imaginary friends, I meant it. But not entirely. If I met any of those folks for the first time, I'd know something. Same with this site: We cracked 10,000 comments yesterday, folks – and it's not just the wit and civility I appreciate, it's the company you provide.

Now, I'm _not_ alone. Wife and child and dog, of course, and now that I'm at the paper involved in a project, I have actual co-workers in a sense I haven’t had since I started at the paper. But nowadays we get to live our lives in the micro and the macro sense; you walk out of the building to feed the meter, and sneak a look at the Twitter feed, and all these voices burst out like a dozen Jack-in-the-Box heads. I can’t imagine living without it because I _can_ remember living without it. The Tower of Babel turns out to be an interesting place after all.

There are times I chide myself for a lacuna in Twitter-posts, but I always remember the same thing straight away: _twitter is not a job._ That's probably why I fade off on weekend afternoons – old instincts reassert themselves, and I fill up the silence in different ways. I do my errands listening to old radio shows from the 40s, usually. On Friday night there's always a point where I'm the farthest away from internet as ever – okay, I'm usually working on the
stuff for the site for the week to come, but there's nothing due now, nothing due tomorrow. I'm as happy then as I am when I'm neck deep in the bitstream.

Anyway. I'm almost done with the week, and have but one more day, one more column, one more NewsBreak to do. So. Photos!

You know what it's like to be a font addict? You see a new coffeeshop in your neighborhood, and think:

Hey, that's Roy Laramie's Husky Stash font. I have that. If you're a font enthusiast, you're probably wondering about that one in the bottom of the picture.

Well, fontdinerdotcom. Duh. (Not the sparkly version.)

Finally: a neighborhood sign I couldn't resist photoshopping. All I had to do was move one letter over.
Column is up (I hope – no link at post time, but startribune.com should have it) 100 Mysteries later in the day, probably early in the evening. See you as soon as possible – and as ever, thanks for dropping by.

Pass it along, if you wish

75 RESPONSES TO FRIDAY, MAY 15

miriam says:
May 15, 2009 at 2:30 pm

What do you mean, there is no flavor called “cupcake”? It tastes like pure sugar, with no added flavor. Next thing, you’ll be telling me there is no flavor called “red Jell-O”!

Nalora says:
May 15, 2009 at 2:59 pm

Here: Have fun with squirrels.

http://www.fontsquirrel.com/

Nal

Seattle_Dave says:
May 15, 2009 at 3:02 pm

White chocolate syrup is readily available at restaurant supply stores. Ghirardelli and Guittard both make one, and I’m sure there are lots of others as well.
Algen says:
May 15, 2009 at 3:27 pm

I also found James sites through a recommendation by Instapundit many years ago. As my father was born and grew up in Two Harbors MN, I enjoy reading James reminisces about growing up in Fargo ND and his stories about living in MN. Over 20 years ago I used to work at Aldus Type Studio in LA, as a large format camera operator. This was back before Windows and most advertising agency's sent out their typesetting work. Of all the different styles of type I have seen over the years I use Balzac for my emails. I really wish that more people would use a personal font when sending emails.

jeischen says:
May 15, 2009 at 4:17 pm

I got pulled into Lileks by Joe Ohio. Where have you gone, Joe?

DavelnAz says:
May 15, 2009 at 4:58 pm

DerKase, I found it at obamiconme.pastemagazine(dot)com. Believe me, you'll tire of it soon. I've got to start using my other avatar here.

Baby M says:
May 15, 2009 at 6:08 pm

I first found the Bleat in the fall of '01. I read it every morning, over coffee and a banana, first thing of the day.

Travis says:
May 15, 2009 at 8:05 pm

And still... no diner.

So, has the newsbreak replaced the diner in your schedule? If so, it is decidedly less than lateral.

That does it. I'm taking matters into my own hands. I'm going to the diner on my own.

Will report results here.

Travis says:
May 15, 2009 at 8:06 pm

Joe is obviously gone with the diner...

Lileks says:
May 15, 2009 at 8:19 pm

I should explain this, but I keep forgetting. The Diner is on brief hiatus, but it will be back.

Jen says:
May 15, 2009 at 9:17 pm

I am addicted to the sparkly fontdiner font. LOVE IT. I use it way more than I should, but everyone needs to have a pointless
indulgence, and that's mine.

juanito - John Davey says:
May 15, 2009 at 10:54 pm

Lileks Says:
May 15th, 2009 at 8:19 pm

I should explain this, but I keep forgetting. The Diner is on brief hiatus, but it will be back.


That's a good deal of juggling – constant blogging at two sites, columns, NewsBreak, and the novel. I can understand where being responsible for the total production of a podcast could get cumbersome.

Don't worry about me. I'll get by. Got to stay strong. Hold my head up. Soldier on. Er, I seem to be running out of pep, vim, and vigor.

In all honesty, thanks for what you do, in all your various mediums. It's received with abundant appreciation!

Lileks says:
May 15, 2009 at 11:02 pm

I think the author of the font is local, too. Check out the rest of his stuff at fontdiner.com; he's very good. And of course there's Mark Simonson and Chank – we're full of clever alphabeticians around here.

Lileks says:
May 15, 2009 at 11:03 pm

Thanks! Truth is, I just needed a break from thinking about it. Besides, if you heard the WFRG 1930s clips posted a few months ago, it's apparent something horrible happened, and that might explain the absence.

Randy says:
May 15, 2009 at 11:48 pm

Enjoyed the “NewsBreak” telecast. The large coffee cup seems a little forced, maybe even uncomfortable? You don't really need it, but it's not a deal breaker, either.

Travis says:
May 16, 2009 at 8:37 am

Just got back.

Old Highway 23 currently terminates into a vast swirling vortex of deep impenetrable nostalgia. No traces of any distinct diner can be found.

Locals appear unaffected. Hardy stock up there.

I suspect the “other” diner has been up to something.

Save us Lileks, your our only hope.
Travis says:
May 16, 2009 at 8:39 am

Oh, and save the dark chef while your at it.

Karen says:
May 16, 2009 at 10:20 am

It's been 2 glorious years since I was introduced to the world of Mr. Lileks. Via books, podcasts, websites, I was amazed at the plethora of material available. WONDERFUL. And also of course the bust of laughing. 😄

This segment was pure genius. Talking cat? My foot!

Are there not actual tv stations with anchormen to do these sorts of things? Or is this a mini type of notation?

As usual, Mr. Lileks delievered the news with good cheer and amusement.

Mike says:
May 16, 2009 at 12:03 pm

So what WAS it? Glory?

Lileks says:
May 16, 2009 at 12:52 pm

It's my office mug, and contains a secret message. A reminder not to take self too seriously.

Reese says:
May 16, 2009 at 3:10 pm

Love the comments, too, I do.

I'm coming to the Health Physics Society's meeting next month. Thanks for having read Lileks dot com for several years, I'll have a different perspective on Mpls this time compared to the last HPS meeting I went to, which was also in Mpls back in the 90s.

Besides touring your local nuclear power plant and the canoe trip on one of your local rivers, I'll watch for some of the landmarks about which I've learned here. Maybe cruise US10. Maybe see that hideous rock'em sock'em library. Maybe go to the OTHER mall.

Steve Ripley says:
May 17, 2009 at 1:05 am

I think we need to send Lance Larson out to Highway 23 to investigate. He could probably entertain the patrons by snagging a doughnut with his spitcurl.

Mxymaster says:
May 17, 2009 at 7:11 am

As for cupcake flavor, our local ice cream stand sells Perry's, and a couple of years back they featured a flavor called Birthday Cake. I asked the girl, “What does it taste like?”
“It’s SOOOO good.”

“Yeah, but what does it taste like? Bits of cake, or icing, or pinata, or….”

“It tastes sooo good.”
So I bought some. It tasted soooo good.

jamcool says:
May 17, 2009 at 10:24 pm

For those who are interested, there is now A&W Root Beer flavored and Dr Pepper flavored ice cream syrups. And also barbecue sauces (by the same company!)

Mxymaster says:
May 18, 2009 at 5:00 am

Update: Before all you nattering nabobs of negativism call me on it, the Perry’s flavor is not Birthday Cake, which would at least sound like food, but Birthday Bash, which sounds like something you get 10 of when you turn 9 (1 for luck + a pinch to grow an inch).
default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Hmm. What to talk about today.

Oh, right.

I knew it was Gazebo-settin'-up-weather when I walked outside; no way around it. Granted, I had some other things to do, like swap out a hard drive, but that would only take a minute or two.

Fifteen minutes later I was still trying to get the drive out of the sled; the screw was stripped, and she wasn't moving. Checked online for a replacement: $40. To compensate for one screw. Well, recalcitrant-part that; I'd find another way. In the meantime, though, daylight's burnin'! Best get to it.

Can't be that hard.

I have done this twice before, you know. Last year's was quite easy, but that's because it was made out of drinking straws and tissue paper, and hence was easy to lift and arrange. That was also why it ended up as bent and twisted as Pier Pasolini towards the end, and I have to put up a new one. Well, I don't
have to, but ever since I built the first outdoor-living-room in 2005, I've loved having a shaded space out back.

So. The raw materials:

The smaller box of obscure items the likes and use of which you have never seen before:

Ugh. You expect an alien face-hugger to burst out.
The Chorus of Fasteners, including several nails you can pound into your head when it gets really bad:
The first step: assemble the top frame. Easily done, except that one screw refused to go in at the proper angle.

This isn’t going to work, is it?

I set the screw aside to try it later. Already had one part left over, and still on page one. Grand. Finished the framework, set it aside. It was big.
I wept out loud when I pulled one roof strut from the box and saw it was bent. No. NO. I will not wait for China to send another. I just won't. What – the other strut was bent. And the other. All four. Then I considered that they were supposed to be bent, and sure enough: the instructions showed them slightly kinked. Ah. Well. Carry on.

More screw-screwing. The phrase “as finely machined as a Chinese nut” does not come to mind for most people, and there's a reason. In order to tighten them up, you had to hold the nut with a cheap little “wrench” with one hand and use your hardy dependable co-worker, Allan Wrench, with the other. I did four before I realized the pointy-screw-end would be visible, as opposed to the nice smooth head-end. Undid them, did them again.

Okay! Making time! Also, a gazebo! I managed to get the roof completely assembled. GOTT IN HIMMEL, this thing is GROSSEN:
Went on to the next step. And I quote:

Nevermind the difficulty of moving that SETI radio-telescope dish across the lawn; how the devil would I secure it to the frame once it was on? Build a trench like they have in oil-change shops?

And how would I get this thing on top of the posts?

Called the Giant Swede. “I will pay you money,” I said. But I knew he’d work for a small cigar.

While waiting for aforementioned large ration of Swede – who got a job, by the way; he was sent to the knackers’ yard when Northwest Airlines was
consumed by Delta, but he found gainful employment in his field within a fortnight – I decided to drain the Oak Island Water Feature's main tank, so I can clean out the accumulated grot, replace the light bulbs, and get that wretched, miserable, soul-searing moneypit going again. I got out the pump, put it in the water, plugged it in.

Nothing.

Tried the other outlets: nothing. So either the outlets were dead, or the pump was dead. This is where you shake your fist at heaven and ask WHY it seems so NECESSARY that we BLEED MONEY OUT OUR NETHER APERTURES EVERY DAY for EVERYTHING.

He arrived a few minutes later, surmised the situation, pulled out his Engineer Mojo and threw the instructions aside. We're going to do this differently, he said. You might think this was a sure route to making something that looked like Homer's BBQ pit, but he's a capable fellow.

How capable? He summoned Velcro from a place where Velcro was thought not to be. One of the instructions said I should attach the roof to the struts using the velcro, but I couldn't find any. Anywhere. Turns out it was pre-attached for my convenience, hanging from the roof. He also managed to get that balky part to fit, channeling John Henry. Pile: driven. Now it was time to attach the legs, bring it up, lean it over, and other maneuvers that made this look like the Hokey-Pokey for centipedes. (NOTE: in this post-Dowd era of attributing everything lest you be accused of plagiarism by people who think it means lifting an entire paragraph a friend read to you over the phone, then copying a few words for some strange reason, one of the many helpful folk who read the afternoon's twitter play-by-play mentioned “the Hokey Pokey” as an example of concise instructions. So that's obviously on my mind. I apologize.)

There was great grunting when the roof was finally added, but it had that honest, plain, Amish-gazebo-raising spirit, and when it was done, it was done, and -

Remember the screws I redid because I didn't want the pointy part looking down? Turns out that meant the pointy part would be looking up, i.e., poking through the fabric roof. So. I redid all eight, with the roof on, which was like changing the sparkplugs on a car with the hood down. But it was done. One more thing – had to put on the skeeter nets, then take them off and put them on again because they were backwards – and it was done.

Except for the chandelier. Yes, it came with a matching chandelier. But this meant getting bulbs, so we went to Home Depot. Nothing like Home Depot at five PM on a Sunday. It's a quiet, contented place. We went to the bulb aisle, where I realized I didn't know what kind it needed. Phoned home. Child was no use whatsoever. GO GET MOM. My wife said I needed C base bulbs. I had no idea there was such a classification system; you learn something every damned day in this life. Found A base, B, G, F . . . no C. Found Ca, though. This would be the calcium base? Asked a clerk if there was any difference
between C and Ca, but she said no, they’re all “Candelabra.”

Should be Li for Liberace, maybe. Bought another *(#$%$# pump, then hit Lunds for some groceries, as the Giant Swede had been instructed via wifely text to pick up some items. Only family I know that buys six gallons of milk at a time. The store, Lunds, is doing its best to assure cash-strapped customers that they’re not really the high-end place they’ve been acting like for all these years, and so they have a new strategy:

BOGO.

That’s right: lots of signs everywhere with the BOGO logo. Buy one, you get one free.

Which would be BOGOF.

BOGO is what always happens. You buy one, you get one. BOGOF is the real term, but it sounds like BOGUS crossed with Eff-Off. In any case I got BOGO cheese and BOGO lemonade. Back home to wire up the chandelier. Cleaned away all the construction detritus, and lit it up:
Ahhhhhh.

**TODAY:** well, it depends; this is ISP switch-over day, so anything could happen. Or not happen. Bear with me. If all goes well I will have the matchbook up around noon, and even though I have nine miles worth of work to chew through today, I may have a surprise later. At least it’ll run sometime this week. Stay tuned, and see you ASAP. Oh – buzz.mn is up, and I’ll be the weather-sports-entertainment anchor on NewsBreak at StarTribune M-Thu as well. Hell of a week coming up, but I don’t care, because A) it’s employment, and B) I love it, and C . . . I have a gazebo. Again. Let the season of sitting outside with a fine beverage and a good book and the sound of the Oak Island Water Feature running dry . . . BEGIN!

### 66 RESPONSES TO *monday, may 18: bogo, or build one gazebo outside*

**HunkBob** says:
May 18, 2009 at 1:09 pm

I suppose guy lines temporarily attached to the vertical members running to stakes in the ground could be attached in the event of high winds. Would be a shame to see this one go away like Dorothy's house in the Wizard of Oz.

**notbilly** says:
May 18, 2009 at 1:15 pm

My favorite BOGO-ish promo is “Buy one, get one half off”, which would be BOGOHO. But they never call it that. Don’t know why not — it's fun to say.

**MikeH** says:
May 18, 2009 at 1:18 pm

I was thinking that crossdotcurve's post was supposed to go to another blog, wasn't paying too much attention. james your a brave man for even attempting this before accessing the big Swede. I suck at assembling things and would have hired someone else immediately to assemble it, or just not bother. And yes i consider myself a real man
Pam-EL says:
May 18, 2009 at 1:23 pm

Just use a small brick of neutronium to anchor each post. You may not have any, but your Giant Swedish Engineer will. They all do. It's the law.

Baby M says:
May 18, 2009 at 1:43 pm

In crossdotcurve's world, the Bush administration is probably responsible for the last gazebo blowing over. You have to admit that it's amusing, however, to see a comment that begins: “Dowd — and the person she shamelessly stole her sentence from — are right . . . .”

Even more hilarity: the AP ran a story about Dowd's overuse of cut-copy-paste, and had to run a correction about it!

My advice: forget politics and enjoy your nights out in the gazebo.

Charlie Young says:
May 18, 2009 at 1:57 pm

Everyone needs a Giant Swede!

Charlie Young says:
May 18, 2009 at 1:59 pm

Today: The Gazebo Conclusion…Tomorrow: The ISP Fiasco!

Mxymaster says:
May 18, 2009 at 2:18 pm

Charlie, those sound like episodes of a Quinn Martin production.

VO: “Grovelsnurt, P.I. … in color!”

[brass music]

“A Quinn Martin production!”

[brasso crescendo]

“Tonight's episode…Death Stalks the Gazebo!”

huddydrvr says:
May 18, 2009 at 3:03 pm

If it was a Quinn-Martin production, half the pictures would be of James driving to Lowe's in his convertible.

Jon says:
May 18, 2009 at 4:19 pm

There is a formula that deals with the weight, size, and parts of the project that therefore requires certain numbers of guys, boomboxes, and coolers full of beer. It sounds like you ignored this Guy Projects Law ® at first, but you wisely adjusted later on.

In order to avoid all the publicity with Gitmo and renditions, sympathetic people in the journalism business are now installing a
network of gazebos and “water features” across the lands, so Cheney and his minions can continue their secret dirty work. Nobody would believe an al-Qaeda operative was subjected to harsh interrogation at Dave Barry's house. It's perfect!

Z says:
May 18, 2009 at 4:51 pm
In England, it's relaxedly written BOGOF in the supermarkets and pronounced 'bogoff', Which I understand is a euphemism for bugger off. This mild vulgarity appeals to us.

shesnailie says:
May 18, 2009 at 5:52 pm
_@_.v – buy two and the second one only costs half the total price you paid!

Nancy says:
May 18, 2009 at 6:23 pm
“On the other hand Nancy says the CIA always lies.”
Hey, I do not say that! OH! You meant that Pelosi broad…

Jazzbo says:
May 18, 2009 at 8:38 pm
Looks great. I hope you have many fine summer nights in your sturdy, chandeliered gazebo.

Elisson says:
May 19, 2009 at 11:02 am
Why, it's glorious! You are now an official Gaze-Bubba.

threeonia.com » These Guys Make Plagiarism Tempting says:
May 19, 2009 at 11:05 am
[...]

VISIT OUR FRIENDS!
A few highly recommended friends...
0: Main Menu
1: Matchbook Museum
2: Comic Covers
3: Black & White World
4: Sears 1934
5: Comic ads
6: 100 Mysteries

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July 2013
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Monday, May 18: BOGO, or Build One Gazebo Outside | The Bleat.

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

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

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http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=2232
Can we learn from our children? Or course! They are honest, brave, unsullied souls who can see so much keener than us because their hearts are not clouded by the false wisdom of experience. Right?

Right: boooshwa. Listening to the wisdom of the wee isn’t an entirely new idea, but I suspect you’d find scant evidence before the sixties. In old TV shows and movies the kids might have an idea, or a theory, and the grown-ups would be too busy pursuing a red herring to pay attention. At the end the cop would push his hat back and scratch his forehead, the universal gesture among old cops when confronted with a youngster who figured things out. But usually kids were seen, heard, loved – and instructed.

Not anymore:
If they’d intimated that Mastercard can be used to placate your humorless little eco-scold, no one would have minded much. But no: the child is making his father a better man. It’s nice to see that Dad exists in a state of such unearthly perfection that the only means of betterment consist of abjuring incandescent lighting for pig-tailed CFLs, right? Alas: dad is a scoff-law who lets the tap run, uses doubleplus ungood bulbs, and doesn’t correct the clerk when the food is put in a cornstarch bag, perhaps because he’s thinking about his job, the cutbacks and layoffs, the tiresome daily scrum of adult life. He works hard, but of course he could work harder – he has a part-time job so he can stay at home with his son. Mom’s full-time. He downshifted so someone would always be there when Ethan came home from school. This makes him an okay man, I guess.

But he could be better. He could buy a fluorescent bulb. On credit.

If I had a Mastercard, I’d print this ad out frame by frame and sent it along with my shredded card. Isn’t it interesting how Dad looks like the sort of delayed-adolescent types most likely to be already concerned about these things, and spending his day working on developing websites for sustainability, hosted on servers powered by methane captured from pig excreta? For that matter, who would like this ad? Wives who regard their husbands as overgrown boys in need of the Moral Guidance of those who will inherit the earth, perhaps. It reminded me of nothing more than this:
One more thing: if the kid didn’t learn these steps to righteousness at home, where *did* he get them?

(h/t Jonah at the Corner)

**On a related note:** I called home yesterday to get someone to check on the type of bulbs I needed for the chandelier; my daughter did not want to go look, because she was busy drawing, and mommy was outside, and maybe I could call later? This did not sit well with me, and I ended the conversation curtly. She got the message, called back, and checked. (Was no help, but she tried.) When I got home we had a conversation about her attitude towards helping.

She said she didn’t want to talk about it anymore, because it was making her feel bad. To which I said, well, that’s not particularly relevant to the discussion. You should feel bad if you did bad.

Later I tried to formulate this into a lesson: if you live your life to *feel* good, you’ll feel bad half the time. If you live your life to *do* good, you will feel good most of the time. Get it?

(Nods.)

Repeat it.

*If I feel my life to – no no, if I try to feel good I will feel bad, but -*

No, if you try to live your life so you’ll feel good – oh, nevermind. Be good, that’s the point.
Okay!

**Beautiful day.** Did a marble-mouthed NewsBreak this morning (weekend sleep habits kept me up Sunday night, leading to five hours of sleep – could not engage the mouth when we shot the show) then wrote all afternoon on a variety of projects. Still behind on everything. Switched over ISPs today painlessly, but had to call the new one to get my password. The tech support person was new on the job, and script dependent – she kept talking about a dot-not, and I had no idea what she was talking about. “Now you are on a dot not, and we need to get you on an MSN number.” Trust me, you don’t. All I needed was the password. I have my modem page up, I’m looking at it – just need the name and password. “Okay sir I am very sorry you cannot connect to the internet I will help you now.” Sigh.

Incidentally, if the picture of the kid above is a mystery, it’s from this movie.

Can’t say it’s a cheery romp or a breezy bedroom farce – it’s one of the most
depressing movies I've ever seen, but that's a consequence of being faithful to the source material. Richard Burton and John Hurt in “1984.”

**This being Tuesday**, the plate is full: Small Town Website of the Week at noon over at buzz.mn, Comic Sins around noon, and Black and White World in the afternoon. Also, NewsBreak at startribune.com. Will I do a better job this time? Yes: I'll have at least five hours and 1 minute of sleep. See you soon.

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**101 RESPONSES TO tuesday, may 19**

![Andrew](https://lileks.com/bleat/wp-content/themes/reviews/images/avatar.png)

Andrew says:
May 21, 2009 at 1:17 pm

“Everyone has an opinion, but your comments here make many of you look rather dumb, to put it politely.”

How so? Dumb because they reflect an immature response to an inanity? Or dumb because they reflect a point of view that jars not with your own?

What is not a big deal to you can be a big deal to others. Tolerance is supposed to teach you that. Funny how it never comes this way.
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?
It was 97 today. Holy Crow. It’s 86 as I write this, and it’s evening. Everyone’s outside – Natalie on the swings, Jasper in the cool grass, wife in the garden. I have my feet up in the gazebo and a Swedish Limoncello at my side. There’s a breeze; the sprinklers on the other side of the fence are going shicka-shicka (In Russian, tschika tschika). All is well, except I really don’t know what a Limoncello is. I’m probably spelling it incorrectly. Let’s check.

Not even close, but I knew that. My Swedish Limoncello is just Absolut and fresh-squeezed lemon juice. Why Absolut? Because it’s not swill, and I’m particular about that. I was amused to see a story about Dan Akyroyd’s new vodka; it seems as if there comes a time in the life of someone whose fame has subsided when he has no choice but to bring out his own vodka, and since the substance is by definition bereft of taste, the marketing kicks in. (Just because it doesn’t have taste doesn’t mean there isn’t a difference – put one of those paint-stripper vodkas in a plastic jug up against a Reyka or a Belvedere, and you’ll see the detect the difference in smoothness and non-gasoliney mouthfeel. But it’s all marketing. I swear I can detect notes of Lava Rock in Reyka, but that’s only because the bottle says it’s strained through the same.)

Akyroyd’s gimmick is a clear glass skull. About $55 a bottle. I saw one over...
the weekend, and wondered why skulls are cool. Yes, yes, death, and all that.
Wicked! But in the Target that very day I saw someone in a stall whose shoes
and shirt had skulls. Dark, man. Hey, I got a skull too! Brothers under the skin!
If we were insects, what would we do? Wear a belt buckle in the shape of a
portioin of our exoskeleton? Wouldn’t be quite the same.

I used to drink Stoli, but I feel as if a quarter of every bottle goes into Putin’s
pocket, somehow.

**Tuesday** was good; it’s a good week. I do love feeling useful, and since this is
a four-day NewsBreak week I am extra useful. And amused: there’s not a
morning I don’t drive to work in my anchorman suit laughing at the absurd
but delightful turn the job has taken. On the way home I listen to the BBC
World Service, which I believe had a story on a Sudanese ceramic artist
today, followed by a report from Stanistan about Troubling Developments in
yak husbandry.

On the way in I listen to music, and discovered that the XM / Sirius thing has
hired another classic DJ: Magic Matt. I’m used to Larry the Duck on the “First
Wave” channel, but he seems so ill-suited to the material; since they have all
sorts of old DJs I assume he made his name somewhere in a larger market
long ago. I’ve never heard of him. I’m sure there are reasons for the name
and I couldn’t care less. But Magic Matt: I’ve heard just a few moments, and
this guy a throwback. Basement pipes, ridiculous persona, the reincarnation
of old AM DJs from the era right before FM took over. I’m not saying it’s good,
but compared to the rest of the stable it’s radio radio, not satellite radio.

Growing up we all had our favorite DJs on the local stations; we all wanted to
be part of their exciting world, no? A place where bad puns and sound effects
were genuine comedy, where men could talk and talk but stop talking just as
the vocals started on the song, a glorious place where the adults believed in
rock ‘n’ roll, man!

Nothing cures you of your love of radio. Not even working in radio. No one
ever forgets the age when you found with the voices in the ether. But I think
the DJ is an anachronism – the idea of a voice that serves as connective tissue
between the songs and the audience has been eclipsed by the innumerable
options we now have, and it’s ironic that the last place the old DJs holds sway
is something that was supposed to be the future.

Anyway, blah blah et. Spent the night on novel work, so that’s it. Except today
will have Out of Context Ad Challenge with a rather detailed answer, the start
of the Gateway Reconstruction Project in the Mpls section, and Miscreant Roundup at buzz.mn when I have the time. See you soon!

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**48 RESPONSES TO** _wednesday, may 20_

**Robert** says:
May 20, 2009 at 12:42 am

Try Tito's Handmade Vodka, James. Made in Austin, Texas. Good stuff.

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**Ross** says:
May 20, 2009 at 2:31 am

James, you need to try a _real_ limoncello from the Amalfi coast (or make your own, especially if one of your tonier local produce suppliers can get Sorrento lemons). Molto delicioso. One college summer, doing summer stock, we hit on a similar poor-man's-version to yours: a decent dry sherry with fresh lemonade—not unlike some of the Italian versions made with darker liquor (more complex, but it doesn't pull out all the lemon oil like 180-proof clear does). I miss the FM deejays around here in the early-to-mid '70s (one of the only good things about the decade), especially late night. Just because the job is technologically anachronistic doesn't mean it should disappear.

---

**bgates** says:
May 20, 2009 at 4:21 am

*where men could talk and talk but stop talking just as the vocals started on the song*

Or better yet, stop talking while the music is on, demonstrating an awareness that instruments can make music too. I bet DJs are a big hit at classical music concerts – rapt silence while the conductor introduces Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, then 40 minutes of yapping about traffic and the weather because, hey, the number doesn't really start until the singer shows up, right?

---

**Cory** says:
May 20, 2009 at 5:06 am

The guys who would have been the best rock DJs are now using their skills in talk radio. Regardless of what you think of Limbaugh's politics, he is clearly a great jock. In Chicago we used to have a whole stable of them at WLS, WGN and WCFL including Lujack (who Limbaugh learned from), Biondi, Winston, Sirott, Landecker, Winston, Collins, Phillips, Weber, Riley and Dahl. Changing formats and musical tastes as well as the emergence of corporate radio essentially killed them off, but even to listen to them today is to listen to pure entertainment, akin to an earlier generation listening to Jack Benny or Fred Allen.
Baby M says:
May 20, 2009 at 5:40 am

There's an art to song sequencing that's not much practiced anymore. I occasionally listen to an Internet station called Radio Paradise which is as close as one can get anymore to progressive FM album rock. The DJ there is a master of stringing things together so they fit.

Mxymaster says:
May 20, 2009 at 6:13 am

Laxatives!

There — that's my answer for the ad challenge. Glad to get that out of my system (so to speak).

Chas C-Q says:
May 20, 2009 at 6:24 am

Being sensitive to the implications of your purchases, you may recall this:


It was a bit of a big deal a little more than a year ago.

Mark G says:
May 20, 2009 at 6:55 am

Larry “the Duck” Dunn was a DJ at the lost and lamented WLIR in NY:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WLIR

Patrick says:
May 20, 2009 at 6:57 am

A good song that really details the downfall of FM radio is Tom Petty's “The Last DJ.” You will only find it either on YouTube, on the album of the same name in any music store, or any music download site. No radio station will play it, because it speaks the truth.

swschrad says:
May 20, 2009 at 7:05 am

Being in the presence of DJs at work doesn't take the mystery out of radio, somehow. Even the squirrelly ones. Erlich ran the console with his feet on weekends, from reclined way back in the chair. Aronson was just as much a bat on a mission working tunes as he was working talk. Dresser owned that microphone totally, even when the WE was being refurbished, he owned its stand until it came back.

When you do it yourself, frankly, it's all hands and stacks flying. Nice when a mood setting session works, but I always had an idea of what I wanted when I was pulling records both at home and at the station. And of course, when you're shut in the room, you change your mind as you go.

a lot of people got that mindset in the 70s and 80s without access to broadcast equipment, they started copying songs onto cassettes and
mailing some to friends with comments, put some in the car. Gary at K-Tel was pretty good.

now it's iPod mixes, and millions do their own.

**Jordan** says:
May 20, 2009 at 7:27 am

Larry the Duck is from NY's (Long Island really since the signal was pretty weak) 92.7 WLIR... back in the 80's they were the only station to play “New Wave” and Alternative... too bad the station died (after a brief revival in the late 90's). He was one of my favorite DJ's... always did wonder what happened to him after WLIR closed down... and now I know. Thanks

**PatRoof** says:
May 20, 2009 at 7:32 am

I quit drinking Absolut when they did their Absolut Mexico ad. [http://tinyurl.com/rxcldf](http://tinyurl.com/rxcldf).

I'll have a Grey Goose and tonic please....well not now, but maybe later....at least have to wait until after noon.

**Grebmar** says:
May 20, 2009 at 7:38 am

Another recommendation for Radio Paradise ([www.radioparadise.com](http://www.radioparadise.com)). Great eclectic selection of music (Beethoven, Beatles, Pink Floyd, and 15,000 more), always put together coherently, with actual segues. Each Song played also has its own dedicated webpage with comments by listeners. Songs are never just chopped off but flow together. What music radio should be.

The only drawback is that it's yet another time sink in the internet.

**Grebmar** says:
May 20, 2009 at 7:39 am

I guess that should be segues, not seques. Sorry.

**Drew** says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:04 am

It's 1975 and I'm fiddling with a little Panasonic AM radio, late at night, up in my attic bedroom in a tiny northern-Wisconsin town. And I pick up a signal from Chicago — CHICAGO! It's WLS, and I hear “Killer Queen” and Elton John and David Bowie, . . . and the first stirrings of disco.

Yep, you don't forget your first encounter with radio.

**Richard Durbin** says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:08 am

Mostly what I want from a radio DJ is to just shut up and play the song. Morning FM broadcast DJ's would drive me nuts with this, which is big reason I jumped to satellite (XM) radio. Even there, they're a bit chattier than I care for.
Bill Peschel says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:13 am

“Nothing cures you of your love of radio. Not even working in radio.”

Good point. I worked at a college station WXYC in Chapel Hill briefly, doing the midnight to seven shift. (Got the job, even though I misidentified a Joy Division album cover as Spandau Ballet.) Gave me the chance to inflict my musical choices and take requests. That’s one of the few jobs I would love to go back to, even knowing what goes on behind the scenes.

In the ’70s, we had a DJ for WAYS-AM that we’d listen to, Jay Thomas. He went on to have an acting career, appearing on Mork and Mindy. I still see him pop up from time to time and think fondly of him.

DJ songs: You could probably do an album of DJ songs. Just coming to mind: The Ramones (Do You Remember Rock ‘n Roll Radio: “Do you remember lying in bed, with the covers pulled up over your head, radio playing so no one can see, we need change and we need it fast, before rock becomes part of the past, because it all just sounds the same to me”), The Kinks (Around the Dial) and They Might Be Giants (Hey Mr. DJ).

John says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:18 am

I don’t know about Tito’s Handmade Vodka: in Austin, Texas, I saw it advertised on a lamppost. (Might’ve been more intriguing if it had been a handmade lamppost, but no dice.) As for radio, the only electronica I ever take on trips is a radio, but this is out of habit: there just isn’t much to listen to. I loved it in the ’80s in San Antonio and in Florianópolis. But now I only remember the times it was freakish, like on Indian reservations, or anywhere in Africa. A great art form, but with too few artists working in it.

Jerry Ray says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:24 am

97? Sheesh. We’ve had a nice cool snap in Atlanta this week, with lows in the upper 40s and highs in the upper 60s/low 70s. It’s heavenly. Except I’m mostly trapped in my office with too much work to do.

Stanistan: my favorite all-purpose made-up Asian country.

DJs: I’m not really old enough to remember the DJs of yore (didn’t start listening to rock radio until the 80s), but I do enjoy a good DJ that’s personable and knowledgable and knows when to shut up. Listening to a pseudo-random selection of songs via Pandora or iPod shuffle is OK, but actual songs selected carefully by an actual human is just BETTER, somehow. There’ve been a few good DJs here in Atlanta over the years, but with all the radio upheaval in the last 10 years or so, they’re gone entirely, or reduced to reading commercials between songs, or lost in the ever-shuffling lineups of stations and formats.

HunkyBob says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:24 am
Growing up in the '70s and '80s in small towns I never had exposure to any good DJ's on the radio.

You'd hear about these DJ's from folks who went to in the big cities, but the only stations we had available were AM ones playing country music which I never developed a taste for, or solid golden oldies, which got stale pretty quickly – within seconds.

I discovered 45's in the '70s but since the parents were totally opposed to pop music, I only heard classical music at home unless I put something on in my room using my little 45 red plastic record player that had been originally bought to play little golden book records or something. It had terrible sound, but what did I know?

I never had anyone introduce me to what is now classic rock until the mid '80s when they set up a repeater for KDKB from Phoenix. By then music was on LP's and cassettes. CD's were still too expensive, although I knew about them, since my best friend's dad was an audiophile. I think the first music I heard from a CD was Wagner.

Now, on the radio, it's usually some talk radio station, and I flip between them to avoid the commercials as much as I can, or I put in a CD. Audio books are a wonderful thing. My only exposure to satellite radio was at a car dealer, I turned on the satellite radio, randomly tuned to a comedy channel and got some guy trying to be funny by using expletives. That was shocked me, because I had never heard words like that come out of a radio. I think the car salesman was a bit embarrassed, too.

**Margaret** says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:25 am

My cool radio moment was with shortwave. The first time I heard “this is London” and the chimes of the BBC world service when I was 14, I was hooked. I feel sorry for kids today, the world seems so much smaller and the BBC plays on NPR at night with no big ben chimes. It sounds just like NPR with British accents.

**Max Webster** says:
May 20, 2009 at 8:25 am

Nothing cures you of your love of radio. Not even working in radio.

Oh, radio cured me of my love for radio, and it cured me fairly quickly.

I started in radio at 16, and by the time I was 20, I was out for good. I joined the frakin’ army to get away from radio.

Now it's thirty years later, and I'm trying to find something to cure me of this systems analyst / solution architect infection

**rbj** says:
May 20, 2009 at 9:10 am

I grew up with WPLJ out of NYC in the 1970s & 80s. Great rock-n-roll station, not so much DJ talk over song intros. Then in July 1984 I went with the family to Britain for a couple weeks. Came back, turned the radio on and heard Michael Jackson. Ugh! Betrayal!! Soon discovered WPIX (IIRC, that was many brain cells ago) and all the cool PLJ DJs moved over as well. Real Rock-And-F'ing-Roll.

These days, I rarely listen to music on the radio. The new stuff just doesn't hold my interest as much, and I guess I'm burned out of the
old stuff. Still can't understand why stations that play that stuff are called "oldies" stations. That simply refers to 1950s music, right?

As for vodka, I prefer Skyy. Clean taste, triple filtered, so it's sort of an inexpensive premium brand. Plus it's made practically next door in Illinois. so I'm supporting the 'murhican economy.

juanito - John Davey says:
May 20, 2009 at 9:15 am

Growing up in Sacramento, a friend of our Family was Hal Murray who DJ'ed at a few Rawk stations, but mostly as a staple at KRAK AM 1140 – all country, all the time. Therefore, I got to hangout with a bunch of country music DJs. Guys like Big Jim Hall, and Joey Mitchell. Since they used to golf with my Dad, when they needed a 4th I was called to service. During the summers, my Dad was at work, and since they had those goofy AM and PM airshifts, they'd hit me up for a quick round of nine in the early afternoons. When I was old enough and good enough to beat them, they quit calling...

Strangely, a few acquaintances work at the new format (more than 12 years, but then KRAK had a long history) Sports 1140 KTHK, notably The Rise Guys (Hello Whitey Gleason, Phantom, & Little Joe Pitman!), and a few producers I know work there as well.

When I think of Radio, I think of the Kinks' song “Around The Dial” about a DJ that is suddenly taken off the air. For my pal Whitely Gleason, he got the ax at 93 Rock as he was giving his daughter's class a tour of the station. For my other buddy, Justin Case, he got called in on his last day of a vacation week and told he was done, even though the week before they had just discussed contract extensions. Radio Executives = Bastards!

Last Verse:

I can't believe that you've been taken off the air.
Think I'll sell my radio now that you're not there.
You never gave in to fashion,
You never followed any trends,
All the record bums tried to hack you up,
But you were honest to the end.
Gonna keep my radio on,
'Till I know just what went wrong.
The answers out there somewhere on the dial.
On the dial.

And here's the entire song – happy listening!
-http://blip.fm/~29k8y

John says:
May 20, 2009 at 9:19 am

“NPR with British accents” – now that's damming. NPR, which I started to call National Highschool Radio after hearing a story about land reform in El Salvador with the sound of somebody digging dirt in the background – was I actually supposed to believe that really was Salvadoran dirt, and if I did, would that make the story more compelling? It's land! They're reforming it! The last time I can remember listening to NPR, it was while driving around western Nebraska and hearing something about AIDS in the Los Angeles hairdresser community. Just what an art form needs: government employees who have no idea what they sound like and are in deadly earnest.
Chris M says:
May 20, 2009 at 9:53 am

I still remember the day WLS FM changed formats. Suddenly Larry Lujack was gone, and I think they even changed call letters. I was like “What? Can they do that?” It was kinda sad for me. I was 14, and still in my old downstairs bedroom. Man this nostalgia is depressing me. I'm such a loser.

roger h (bgbear) says:
May 20, 2009 at 10:11 am

I second Skyy, did not know it was distilled in Illinois (ADM?). Absolute had that stupid California as Mexico/Aztlan ad and that turned me off to them.

Any of the vodkas they carry at Trader Joes except the stuff in plastic bottles is good and inexpensive even Burnett at $6 a bottle.

“At these prices you can't afford to stay sober” 😊

One of my favorite DJs of the 80s was “Big” Rick Stewart in San Jose called “your invisible friend on the radio” after a caller used that phrase to describe him.

JamesS says:
May 20, 2009 at 10:39 am

Magic Matt? A few days ago I wrote a letter of complaint about him to the XM Sirius people. IMHO he shows a severe disrespect for the music on the '70s channel where I hear him — his intro winds up with “oceans and oceans of elevator music all day long!” My wife says this is what the kids like these days, mocking the '70s music in a way they don't any other.

If that's true then GET OFF MY LAWN YOU DAMN KIDS [shakes fist].

Anyway, I got an email back a few days later expressing interest in my opinions and asking me to call in to discuss them further. That seemed a little weird to me, and then I noticed the email was from “Art Carlson, '70s on 7 Music Director.”

“Art Carlson?” “Arthur Carlson”? In radio...?

Hmmmmmmm...

avr says:
May 20, 2009 at 10:47 am

Akyroyd's gimmick is a clear glass skull

It's worse than that. It's not just a skull because skulls are, like, cool, Bro, but a “crystal skull.” As in, themed on the same pseudoscience/folk legend/Art Bellery upon which the last Indiana Jones movie was based. That's a little wacky, even for Ackroyd.

Spud says:
May 20, 2009 at 11:39 am

I like to dial in the college stations, as they will occasionally surprise you (in a good way). It can be interesting to hear some kids having fun with whatever genre they are featuring for a few hours. Sometimes they'll play a good tune too.
Back when I attended Rutgers the school's station would have a reggae show followed by a jazz show on Thursday evenings. I was also close enough to pull in stations out of NYC, including one featuring hard bop. They were good enough where I taped some broadcasts, and I still listen to those tapes over 25 years later.

jeischen says:
May 20, 2009 at 11:43 am

I remember an FM DJ in the late ’70s who went by Les Michaels aka “The Boogie Man.” He was a top DJ in the Oklahoma City market. The first time I heard Rush Limbaugh speak, I swore they were the same person. My first radio experience was in the 3rd grade, listening to WKY AM radio. Lots of Motown and Led Zeppelin, as I recall. The top DJ, Ronnie Kaye, also had his own Saturday afternoon teen dance show on WKY’s TV station. Believe it or not, he’s still an oldies station DJ, although you can hear his dentures clicking over the microphone. My favorite radio moment: Sitting in my car late at night, barely able to pull in the Oklahoma University college radio station’s weak signal and hearing the Dead Kennedy’s uncensored “Too Drunk to F***” for the first time.

ecb says:
May 20, 2009 at 11:46 am

97 DEGREES! in May! Yuck. I sometimes find this time of year so depressing because I always feel like summer (hot, sticky, enervating summer) will suddenly pounce on me, taking away those lovely crisp cool spring days and leaving me in a pool of sweat.

juanito - John Davey says:
May 20, 2009 at 11:47 am

roger h (bgbear) Says:
May 20th, 2009 at 10:11 am
One of my favorite DJs of the 80s was “Big” Rick Stewart in San Jose called “your invisible friend on the radio” after a caller used that phrase to describe him.

Big Rick Stewart: Here you go: -http://www.bigrick.fm/index2.html

My old pal and now FOX Business anchor Tom Sullivan has always said “Tom Sullivan here, IN your radio”.

rbj says:
May 20, 2009 at 11:48 am

Did not know about the Trader Joe vodkas. Have to try them out next time I’m there.

roger h (bgbear) says:
May 20, 2009 at 12:51 pm

thanks for Ricardo Grande (what Chris Isaak calls him) link, good to hear about him and I did not know he was on KFOG.

Weird, I also was shocked to see Peter Finch in the KFOG morning news/drive time. I went to school with Peter and his sister, they are older than me. Peter did FM radio while in highschool in the 70s.
We have had a plethora of Rick Stewarts in Sacramento Radio of late. Sadly, the most notable passed away recently. His last job being at the Original Home of the Rush Limbaugh Show, KFBK AM 1530. It gets confusing with more than 3 Rick Stewarts...

James, do you remember Ol’ Reb from KFYR Bismarck? I became aware of radio and DJ's growing up in Oakes, ND in the fifth grade or so. KFYR was the strongest signal, I even remember being able to pick it up one night in Laramie, WY.

Vodka is for effete snobs who can’t handle Everclear (we can buy the 190 proof version in my neck of the woods).

Fie on flavorless ethanol. I'll take rum, gin, or Bourbon over that swill any day. Preferably all three. Later in the evening, simultaneously!

Never picked up K-Fire – I think they were directional, and the signal didn’t make it to Fargo.

I've always wanted to be a DJ since the 60s when, in Columbus Georgia of all places, we had a DJ who really understood that what the listener wanted was music. To hear music, to hear how music was made, to hear talk about people who made music. Not talk about their latest divorce, but about the music.

This DJ would play a song from Led Zep and then pull out the original blues version and play it. He would string together a couple of songs with the only connection the writer (that's how I learned about Doc Pompus).

He'd have contests to “name that instrument.” Have a Sunday afternoon of Rolling Stones and the musicians who influenced them.

Of course, this was before FM, so playing several cuts off an album made him a real pioneer.

I wish I could remember his name. I always wonder if he later turned up at WWOOLLDD.

stations are generally directional only at night. KFYR was another 5000 watter up on the high end of the dial. the transmitter was close to the river, so they had a good ground plane, but 5KWs are only
good for about 80-120 miles daytime.

which works out well if you're in the radio business, because a
couple of ad salesmen can service the territory and keep it local.

you get into the clears like WCCO and KSTP, you need the extra
territory and national ad sales to keep the transmitter powered.
there are only one or two clears in the US that do not go directional
at night. have to hit the FCC site to be sure, but I think KARK little
rock was one of them, and they had quite the evening shows in the
70s.

RebeccaH says:
May 20, 2009 at 3:37 pm

It's nice (or reassuring, whatever) to know that you used to like
Stoli. I used to drink Stoli too, but after the second heart attack
(I***ing genes), Stoli, like everything else I like, became a once-in-a-
rare-special-occasion thing. On the other hand, sometimes I cheat,
because what is quantity of life without quality?

Baby M says:
May 20, 2009 at 4:43 pm

Spud: *I like to dial in the college stations*, ...

May I give a shout-out to WRDL at Ashland University in Ashland,
Ohio, 88.9FM “The Eagle,” which sounds exactly like a bunch of 19-
year olds with a transmitter and their roomies' stack of CDs. On one
trip with my oldest son, as we were passing Ashland on I-71 the kid
on duty strung together a set with Aretha Franklin (“R-E-S-P-E-C-T”),
Flogging Molly (“What's Left of the Flag”), and The Beatles
(“Paperback Writer”).

Glorious.

vanderleun says:
May 20, 2009 at 5:47 pm

“new vokda;” “paint-stripper vodaks”

Ha-ha, you are just with us haffing the leetle choke, dah?

Headless Unicorn Guy says:
May 20, 2009 at 6:48 pm

*Nothing cures you of your love of radio. Not even working in radio.
No one ever forgets the age when you found with the voices in the
ether. But I think the DJ is an anachronism – the idea of a voice that
serves as connective tissue between the songs and the audience has
been eclipsed by the innumerable options we now have, and it's ironic
that the last place the old DJs holds sway is something that was
supposed to be the future.*

“Heard you on the wireless back in Fifty Two
Lying awake intent at tuning in on you
If I was young it didn't stop you coming through
Oh-a-oh...”

Ross says:
May 21, 2009 at 2:21 am
“And radio is in the hands/
Of such a lot of fools/
Tryin’ to anesthetize the way that you feel.”
Can’t believe no one volunteered Elvis Costello’s “Radio, Radio” (the
on-the-spot-substitution of which song got him banned from SNL.
Morons–they wanted him to play a tune based on an incident in
Britain’s past that he knew the American audience wouldn’t
know/couldn’t care less about) or Bowie’s “D.J.” for the DJ Album.

Ross says:
May 21, 2009 at 2:22 am

Oh, and Wall of Voodoo’s “Mexican Radio”, of course.

Bill says:
May 21, 2009 at 5:41 am

If you really miss good old hits radio, may I suggest you give Ricky
the K a spin:
http://www.60sradio.com/

I’ve been a subscriber for years and there’s nothing else like it.

No, I don’t get paid, and this isn’t meant to be an ad, I just love the
program.
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?
THURSDAY, MAY 21

Windy:
A sign and a heavy ashtray did a header, and they were both shielded by the building. Just turning your face to the gusts was like a professional exfoliation. It's the sort of wind that can expose bone, if you give it time. I was sitting upstairs in the studio banging away at something when I heard something banging away downstairs. Heart: seizes.

*The gazebo.*

That might be the name for this entire story: the Gazebo Seizes. (Or the Angina Monologues.) I went downstairs expecting to find the thing had walked across the patio, but it hadn't moved an inch. UPS was right; it does weigh too much. Incidentally, Target no longer offers the Wellington Gazebo online. That's right: Apparently I was the only guy who ordered it, and my experience took it off the site. The power of the internet! Actually, probably the power of print, since I wrote a column about it as well. In any case, the Power of Complaining! Second only to the Politics of Dancing!, to cite a stupid song I heard on the way to work. I winced when that one first came out – oh, this has to be political, too. We are striking a blow against Reagan by dancing, are we? Establishing a new communitarian ideal by jumping up and down? At least the song was followed by Romeo Void – there's a perfect 80s band name. The lead singer is 55 years old this year. *Maybe I'd like you better if we napped together.*

Work was the New Routine: not just NewsBreak, but two video interviews with reporters about a breaking story. Don't know how they do this for reals on the actual TV stations, but we have no teleprompters for the intros and outros; it's just look up, say hello, and start talking. It's amazing the things you say when you're just talking; I found myself saying that someone was “on the lam,” at one point. Well, all that 40s lingo is just sitting around in public domain; someone has to put it to use.

I had a moment to begin the renewal of the Oak Island Water Feature. First step: drain the water and clear out the indescribably foul-smelling leaves. Got out the new pump. Last one broke. It had a year warranty. Bought it . . . a year ago. The new one looked good BUT OH FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE
The hose didn’t fit. Because we ALL HAVE THOSE OTHER HOSES SITTING AROUND, don’t we. No need to make it garden-hose compatible. Well, adopt, adopt, improve:

This worked. The pond drained in an hour. While the pump whined and belched forth the foul liquids, I took Natalie to karate, and afterwards we got take-out. Meals I do not wish to explore:

HOST WITH THE MOST
With a side of angry estranged relatives, please! While we waited the man at the counter took note of Natalie's wooden pole; it must be amusing to see all the local kids tromp in for training in the martial arts of the East.

“You have half a chopstick,” he said. Natalie frowned. “In past, people, giants. Very big. That was one chopstick.”

She grinned; he warmed to the topic.

“Five hundred years ago, war all the time. So people eat, and war starts, they use chopstick for fighting.” He winked. “In past, people, giants.”

—

Via Cartoon Brew: the voice of Mickey Mouse died. Wayne Allwine. He’d been doing the voice since 1977, and was only the third person to voice the character. (The first was Walt, of course; the second was Jimmy MacDonald, a Scotsman who was also an FX artist. Wikipedia says some of his FX can still be heard on Spongebob Squarepants, and I’d love to know what those are. The man who voiced Mickey in 1947 still has his work appearing today? Cool. Wiki also says Walt was too hoarse from smoking to do the voice anymore, which is interesting. Mickey wouldn’t be the same if he was bent over hacking out a tiny lung. Apparently Walt had a horrible cough – subordinates could hear him coming down the hall, hawking away. It was edited out of every TV appearance. I’ve never seen a pic of Walt at Disneyworld with a heater, but when they recreated his office in one attraction, there’s the ashtray on his desk. Clean and sparkling.

Anyway, here’s the fact that just made me smile: Wayne Allwine was married to the voice of Minnie Mouse.

Today: the penultimate installment of Curious Lucre, and Lance Lawson Thursday over at buzz.mn.
54 RESPONSES TO thursday, may 21

Rika says:
May 21, 2009 at 4:24 pm

@LarsWalker – you reminded me of my very favorite joke: What's the difference between a telephone pole?

Fish. Because ice cream doesn't have bones.

Gets ‘em every time....

Ross says:
May 22, 2009 at 12:28 am

huddydrvr: HA! I LOVE that joke(but you have to do Mickey's voice for the punchline to work).

Patrick:
“I remember someone telling me that Mexican/Spanish food was actually a bit spicier down in Mexico than it is up here.”

Not necessarily—as Anthony Bourdain related in a “No Reservations” episode, when it was his turn to make the staff meal he often being the only non-Latino in the kitchen, in nearly every US restaurant & he made something from south of the border(cause he wanted to give them a touch of home), invariably one of the Mexican cooks would say, “Why you Nortes make it so hot?”

And my own experiences with Mexican family cooking backs that up, here in Milwaukee, in Albuquerque(as a child) & in SF(as a teenager). Probably depends what region you're talking about.

Baby M is right about not only many Chinese flavorings, but other Asian cuisines, as well: many typical flavor notes don't go over well here. But, luckily for us, Chinese cooking (like the culture in general over the centuries) has always had a pick-&-choose/adapt to local conditions attitude(it's how chop suey came to be), which means on some level, a good Chinese chef practising here is just as authentic as any in the old country. My own local favorite restaurant is a classic example of that sort of approach: the owners are a Midwestern gal(who met her chef hubby-to-be while a foreign studies major) and a chef from one of the islands(can't remember if it's Quemoy, Matsu, or what) that was so badly shelled in the 1958 attempt to grab them from Taiwan that his home was pretty much uninhabitable. So, when he came here & started cooking, he didn't really have a regional bias—which means I get a bit of everything, without it all coming out mostly Cantonese, Hunan or what have you. Emperor of China on Brady Street: if you're here in Milwaukee for Summerfest or one of the ethnic festivals in summer, do go try them.

John says:
May 22, 2009 at 12:48 pm

Anyway, here's the fact that just made me smile: Wayne Allwine was married to the voice of Minnie Mouse.

Not without precedent — When the Max Fleischer studio was located in Miami in the late 1930s and early 40s, Popeye's voice, Jack Mercer, was married to the woman who provided the voice of Olive Oyl, Margie Hines. (Of course, as soon as Paramount moved the studio back to New York in the mid-40s, they hired the original
voice of Olive, Mae Questel, back, and Mercer and Hines later got a
divorce, so things didn’t really end up happily ever after).

Dan says:
May 27, 2009 at 11:45 am

James, I have that same pump or one that looks very much like
yours. You appear to be missing a part as mine clearly has an
adapter that fits a standard garden hose. Perhaps you should take it
back?
Gas hit $2.45 at my local station today. A little over two weeks ago it was $1.87. Where are the stories about gouging? Obscene profits? Peak oil? I still recall a local columnist expressing amazement that gas stations could raise the price on the stuff they already had in the tank. If you didn't need any more proof of their perfidy, well, you were probably one of those people who worked for the Gas Combine, and hence met every other Tuesday in a suburban Perkins' backroom to plot the ruin of civilization under the guise of a Rotarian meeting.

(He's not a local columnist anymore.)

I was driving to get ice, because my wife had Bunco at the house. “Bunco” is an Italian word that means “hen party,” and once or twice a year it's here at Jasperwood. This means great irritation for the dog, who now has 10 plates to check for scraps, and just as many people to command to GIVE. A few years ago the Bunco gig meant I took Natalie to Chuck E. Cheese's, but that's over. I'm not sure why, and I regret it. Not the pizza – that stuff is still vile – but we had fun there, and somehow it slipped off the list of things we do. Before I go into boo-hoo laments about My Baby Growing Up, she wanted to go tonight, but it was already too late. Bunco was in motion.

So I've been upstairs all night doing this and that. I slip downstairs and hear words bobbing up from the fugue of conversation – Fishnet, Cloth Diaper, Husband, Personal Trainer, Tequila, IPhone. Some day someone will invent a
machine that records every word spoken in a room, then threads them together into a master narrative, a story that arises from the individual, disconnected conversations. At that point the short story will be dead.

Natalie was also upstairs. In the old days she would want to hang around mommy and be with mommy and make mommy's sole night of peer-bonding impossible, which is why we went to CEC; tonight she was content to lounge in bed and design a logo for a candy company based on a Webkinz plush. Me, I’m trying to keep my head from hitting the keyboard. I did do one very cruel thing, the sort of move I should have thought about before, since I was putting the shiv to husbands I’ve never met. I went downstairs to forage through the leftovers, and there were a few plates and pans that needed washing up, so I did them.

Without being asked.

Oh, I’m a right bastard, I am.

Put daughter to bed. She was whistling the Surprise Symphony by Haydn, but couldn’t remember the name. “Russian Sailor’s Dance?” No. “Oh right that’s this.” And they she whistled the Russian Sailor’s Dance. Lest you think she marinates in a tea-and-crumpets cultural broth, she mostly listens to songs on Warrior Cats tribute vids on YouTube, so Haydn is an improvement.

“I moved stuff in my room,” she said. “I moved the dolls. They were creeping me out.”

I could understand why – they were American Girl knockoffs, and she was never ever into that.

“Too girly girl,” she explained.

“You were never a girly girl,” I said. “Although you liked Barbies. And My Little Ponies.”

“I still do. They’re cute.”

Always do; please, just a part of you, always do. “I never thought you were going to be a girly girl. But what does that mean?”

She squealed: “I like pink and lollipops and clothes and pink! Tee hee!” Then she looked around her room. Her pink-accented room. “It’s kinda girly girl.”

“It’s you,” I said. “It has good graphics.”

“Yeah.” Then she looked at her nightshirt. “But I don’t want to be a tomgirl. I have a black nightgown. But you gave it to me. And it’s a Mac T-shirt. So.”

“So. So don’t worry. Do what you want to do and never mind if it’s one thing or the other.”

She seemed to like that. I adjusted my fishnet and tugged on my diaper, and kissed her goodnight.
This article in the WSJ is fascinating & depressing – if you’re a traditionalist, perhaps, and if you define “tradition” with such elasticity that it encompasses the mall-culture of the 70s and 80s. Malls are closing. Malls are dying. Part of the problem is the Current Difficulties, of course, but there are other factors less alarming. One: neighborhoods change. As neighborhoods decline, the malls go down. To quote 10 eminent economists: duh. Two: the alternative is more attractive. Online has chipped into their sales, of course, but the “lifestyle centers” – to use the vacuous pre-crash term – are often more appealing than the sterile mall halls. I spent a night in a Phoenix-area “Lifestyle Center,” and it had all the mall stores, but it had something else: surprise. It meandered, it had corners, nooks, piazzas, neighborhoods. It was open to the elements. You may say: well, that works in Phoenix, but as it happens it was a cold rainy night in December, and it was thus the clammiest night in a mall I’d ever had. But they had a huge gas fire in one of the plazas, and I sat under an awning with a cup of coffee, more or less content. I preferred it to Fashion City, which was the architectural equivalent of the Sanitary Meat-Wrapping machine we discussed a few days ago.

I like my mall, but I have every right to do so: it’s the first. Southdale is a cultural artifact, and its current travails are a perfect reflection of the trend it begat. I don’t like the Mall of America. I like small-town enclosed malls, but only in a disinterested sense: you can stand in the middle, chart the refurbs and retrofits, find an ancient piece left over from its original incarnation, find a few local stores that decamped from downtown to be where the money was going. It’s your chance to be a sociological empath.

In the end, however, you usually end up with nothing more profound than “the Gap’s near the Sears here, but it’s by the Penneys in the other mall.” We love the malls we visited as kids and teens, and that had more to do with what we did and who we did it with than the type of structure. Kids who grow up around “Lifestyle Centers” will have the same nostalgia, and someone will make a “Fast Times at Ridgemont High” movie about them. Without the escalators. For those of us in a cold clime, we’ll always have a mall. But the paradigm established in the 70s has truly peaked and cracked, and that represents the revenge of the thing the mall replaced. The first malls were intended to be urban centers of a new sort, all the old nuisances and noises walled off. Clean, modern, climate-controlled, rational – everything cities weren’t. Now some end up as empty as the downtowns they replaced. Live long enough, and you’re guaranteed to see the next new thing arrive, thrive, and die. And then comes the next new thing, heralded by those who believe the world began yesterday.

He said, cross-eyed with exhaustion. Long day – up early for TV, no nap, this, that, and the other thing. I leave you with something I found while looking through old comics.

IRRITATED BEAR.
Later today: MORE IRRITATED BEAR. Also “100 Mysteries.” And there's a Startribune.com column waiting for you, as well. See you soon.

57 RESPONSES TO friday, may 22

Dennis Johnson says:
May 22, 2009 at 1:26 pm

Speaking of My Little Pony:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXoYK4b_q24

Giddy Up!

Kev says:
May 23, 2009 at 12:27 am

(Conversely, and I forget who said it, but the new Lifestyle Centers are designed to replicate the feel of the old downtown shopping areas ... but minus the other denizens of decaying downtowns that moved shopping outlets to the suburbs in the first place.

Precisely. I'm a fan of lifestyle centers because they have all of the good things about downtowns (cool architecture, greenspace, walkability) without the bad ones (panhandlers, funny smells, unsafe feelings, and other stuff that might well be called “urban grit”).
I was really happy when my area's mall opened as a “town center” instead of a traditional enclosed mall a few years ago; we'd never have things like live concerts in the park or Fourth of July fireworks from the latter. (But you should have heard the people gripe when the concept was first announced: “It'll be too hot to shop outside in Texas! Nobody will ever go there!” Waaaaah!"

@DryOwlTacos: I agree with you re Prestonwood; back when enclosed malls were the only option, that was one of the best. I still can't believe that it's gone and Valley View still stands; it seems like it should have been the other way around.

**Kev** says:  
May 23, 2009 at 12:29 am

One more thing: I was happy to see a shout-out to the [Labelscar](http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=2336) in the WSJ article; it's a really cool site, and it focuses on “live” malls as well as dead ones. Those guys do good work and deserve all the attention they're getting right now.

**jenifersf** says:  
May 23, 2009 at 12:03 pm

I was visiting a friend in Minneapolis and I wanted to go to the Mall of America. The thing about it that was the most strange and fascinating to me: lockers! And also that there was a Nordstrom and a Nordstrom Rack in the same mall.

I quite liked it.

**New Suburbanism... « 20 Prospect** says:  
May 23, 2009 at 1:20 pm

[...] 23 05 2009 Interesting article on the decline of shopping malls over at the WSJ (hat tip James Lileks. At the risk of schaudenfreude, I have to say it made me smile. There's a certain irony to [...]  

**Thomas G.** says:  
May 23, 2009 at 1:34 pm

So, according to the Wall Street Journal article, what is killing the mall is a mall dressed up to look like Main Street Inc.

Welcome to New Suburbanism.

**Tim** says:  
May 24, 2009 at 12:55 pm

I moved from Minneapolis the year the Mall of America was complete, so I only saw it a few times here and there. The main thing it did for the stores is that it drew all the business away from the few downtown projects like Riverplace, Bandana Square, Gavidae Common, Nicollet Ave, etc. that were meant to be shopping areas that kept people in the city longer, and create more of a mix for the downtowns of Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Years later every so often I’d come back, and see all those downtown projects dry up and get converted to office space. It was too bad. The banks of the mississippi was much more picturesque to dine in view of, or have a beer, than the hallways of the MOA with the enclosed environment and endless stores. The amount of attention to detail
and light/architectural motifs in Riverplace was stunning too! Brass railings, inlaid tile, etc. All of that is now wasted on over-built looking office space that people only see 9 to 5.

The main thing that bothers me about the Mall of America is that it's not architecturally significant… it's put together in a way no more special than an aircraft hanger. Go down the strip in Vegas and, like it or not, at least you can say “Oh yeah, there's the casino built like a mini-Paris, or New York. There's the fountains at the Bellagio”

What does the MOA offer architecturally? It looks like any other mall, only that it goes on forever and ever.
Had a picture-taking afternoon with Natalie for her class project. Some shots of the neighborhood follow. The old streetcar, still in service:
Ol’ PCC #322. Served the Twin Cities from ’46 to the early 50s, then did a stint as a subway car in the Newark system, then lived out its days in Cleveland before it was brought back home and refurbished.

That’s the lake in the background on the left.

You can see why I like it here, eh? Well, we also paid a trip to the local ice cream store, Liberty Custard:
It's a refurbished Standard Oil station. Inside, many retro joys, including this stunning sight:

Not just candy cigarettes, but VICTORY brand candy cigarettes. They have a few old pinball machines, including the 1966 Gottlieb “Crosstown.” Detail of the backplate:
An old supply cabinet featuring Val E. Forge. How nice he got a job at a company whose name sounded like his:
Off to the water tower:
The giant crusaders are the Defenders of Health, ensuring the Purity of our Waters.
Fitting image for today. And a happy Memorial Day to you all!

48 RESPONSES TO *memorial day 2009*

**Who Am Us Anyway** says:
May 25, 2009 at 2:05 am

Excellent in all ways. Thanks.

**Brian Lutz** says:
May 25, 2009 at 2:21 am

Yes, it may have been a Standard Oil station, but for 10 bonus points, the question is this: Which Standard Oil company was it?

Believe me, that question is a lot harder to answer than it might seem.

**shesnailie** says:
May 25, 2009 at 6:07 am

@_v – standard oil of indiana?

**shesnailie** says:
May 25, 2009 at 6:08 am

@_v – aka amoco?

**Chris M** says:
May 25, 2009 at 6:54 am
Wow, candy cigarettes. Haven't seen those in, oh, four decades, I think.

exgeeeye says:
May 25, 2009 at 6:58 am

You made me think of “1984” and “Dr. Strangelove within three minutes. Either you're that good, or I'm that weird. I shall forth to rumination.

Nancy says:
May 25, 2009 at 8:12 am

I am in awe and love of your water tower. Fighting envy--which of course would be bad. I am a fan of the classic old patinated painted tanks here in rural areas of Georgia, but that tank has so much style! On a side note, if those are lilacs... sigh. That is one thing I miss from my childhood in Michigan. Sorry, but all cultivars I have seen that were developed for the southern heat do not stack up.

Margaret says:
May 25, 2009 at 8:18 am

Yeah Lilacs and Memorial Day in Michigan, I remember that too Nancy. We would cut branches from our trees and take them to the cemetery. Wonder if people still do that.

What's the deal with the woman in the MTA car window? She seems to be having a great time on the bus a la the deli scene in “When Harry Met Sally.”

Al Federber says:
May 25, 2009 at 8:30 am

“Crusaders” aren't really a fitting image for any day.

Baby M says:
May 25, 2009 at 9:02 am

I love PCCs. When I was really small, my father used to take me to Pittsburgh for baseball games. Morning B&O train to Pittsburgh, ride the incline, ride the streetcar downtown to meet Uncle Myron, then ride to Forbes Field in a Cadillac with power windows. Heady stuff in 1963-4-5.

The Pittsburgh trolley system was preserved intact until 1964, when the Port Authority took it over. They started ripping up rails and cutting up cars with gleeful abandon, all while seeking buckets of tax money to build a replacement monorail called “Skybus.” Fortunately, someone figured out that the trolley was “light rail,” and therefore hip mod and trendy, before it was all gone. They replaced the last PCCs a few years ago.

Bridey says:
May 25, 2009 at 9:02 am

That crusader is quite beautiful — I love the stern expression on his face. Water towers around here are few, and out in the more rural areas the towers are often festively painted, but no crusaders.
Bill McNutt says:
May 25, 2009 at 9:28 am

Can you really HAVE a “happy” memorial day? Mine are always contemplative.

Bill

Alfonso says:
May 25, 2009 at 9:36 am

I have no problem with Crusaders. With or without the “scare quotes”! So there! Yes James, I do see why you love it there. Iconic statuary on the water tower, retro street car and candy cigarettes! Can't get much better says me.

IrritableBear says:
May 25, 2009 at 9:40 am

Al, at the risk of starting a flame war here (which is the last thing I would want to do), I completely disagree. Furthermore, I think you've chosen the wrong day to state your point.

But them again, I'm irritable today.

ScottG says:
May 25, 2009 at 10:04 am

These pictures show us that a place without history is empty. Living in a city that constantly renews itself is heady, but the past is gone. Never to return or be contemplated, except in little displays in the back of a dusty museum.

Dan Holway says:
May 25, 2009 at 10:32 am

Why the unlikely price of 47¢ for the candy coffin nails? ("or 3 for $1.41")

Al Federber says:
May 25, 2009 at 11:41 am

@IrritableBear — The men who flew the planes into the Twin Towers on 9/11 were crusaders. Let us not encourage that mindset. Memorial Day is hardly the “wrong day” to bring up the evils of warmaking. There couldn't possibly be a better day to do so.

fizzbin says:
May 25, 2009 at 12:01 pm

IrritableBear, I agree with you. Today I watched live coverage of the laying of the Wreath at Arlington, salty, bitter tears running down my face remembering all my Airborne Brothers who died around me, forty-one years ago. Those tears changed to tears of pride and joy when I saw MY president (who I did not vote for) tenderly and respectfully pay homage to all American Warriors, Crusaders of Liberty and Equal Justice Under Law. Yesterday, by the grace of God, the Great Mystery, I spent the day with my multi-ethnic family,
playing with my grandkids. I can think of no better way to celebrate the life and sacrifice of our fallen heros than to love and protect all of our children here and, when possible, in other lands.

Thank you, Mr. Lileks for your commentary, pics, puzzles and Doris.

**Mike Kozlowski** says:
May 25, 2009 at 12:13 pm

... I may have ridden that trolley when it resided in Cleveland (actually, Olmstead Township, out by the airport) – I took my son there several times when he was younger, just so he could see how it used to be. The best part was that several cars there were former Cleveland cars, a couple of which my father almost certainly rode. It's fun to think that the three of us looked out the same windows forty years apart and wondered at the rest of the world...

Best Regards,
Mike Kozlowski
Columbia SC

**Nancy** says:
May 25, 2009 at 12:22 pm

From Mike Kozlowski Columbia SC:

“It’s fun to think that the three of us looked out the same windows forty years apart and wondered at the rest of the world…”
You pretty much hit the nail on the head as to why I am such a nostalgia/history buff.

Happy memorial day and thanks to all who gave the ultimate gift...

**Bridey** says:
May 25, 2009 at 1:13 pm

The purpose of Memorial Day, of course, is to honor the memory of those who died in service to our country. How is it necessary or useful to harp on the “evils” of war on a day set aside precisely to acknowledge one of war’s most terrible costs?

Soldiers know the price of war intimately well, in ways the rest of us can never understand, and they know what is appropriate today. One could do worse than follow their lead.

**Al Federber** says:
May 25, 2009 at 2:05 pm

@Bridley — I think the best way to honor the memory of those who have died in the service of “our country” (they actually died for the federal government and the elites who own it) is to make ourselves keenly aware of why and how those people were sent to war in the first place.

Many people feel better about our war dead thinking that they died to keep Americans free. Well, does anybody really think we’re as free as we were before our wars of empire (including Iraq and Afghanistan) began?

Practically every move we make is now subject to some sort of government regulation, and it’s only getting worse under Obama. We are forced to relinquish nearly 50% of what we earn to government at all levels. There are so many laws on the books that everyone is now a criminal. Your communications are subject to
interception without any real cause. The U. S. government can detain you indefinitely without giving a reason. The list goes on. Is this the “freedom” they died for? Nonsense. Bloody nonsense.

Bridey says:
May 25, 2009 at 2:16 pm
Sure, Al, whatever.

Nancy says:
May 25, 2009 at 2:37 pm
Dang Al, give it a rest.

HelloBall says:
May 25, 2009 at 4:37 pm
As is quickly becoming his theme music, “there's no bore like a political bore.”

RJ says:
May 25, 2009 at 5:08 pm
Dear Al,

Please don't be that way, on this day, in this place.

Bob

NeeNee says:
May 25, 2009 at 6:57 pm
Al Federber:

You get it. I get it. As the Obama presidency wears on, Bridey, Nancy and HelloBall will get it, too. And will remember your words.

rivlax says:
May 25, 2009 at 7:27 pm
Love our periodic references to pinball machines. My favorite all-time is “Happy Clown,” a mid-'60s Gottlieb machine that I played all during high school. Just the right combination of bumpers at the top and good targets for the flippers. A GREAT pinball machine.

http://www.ipdb.org/showpic.pl?id=1114&picno=1086

Bridey says:
May 25, 2009 at 7:36 pm
NeeNee, since you go so far as to name-check me, I’ll just say it is best not to make assumptions about people's political opinions based on how they respond to a tiresome bore on a non-political forum. (The odds that I will remember any of Al's words more than momentarily on any topic whatever are also fairly slim.)

And, having hijacked the comments thread to far too great a degree today, I now withdraw, with due apologies.
Grebmar says:
May 25, 2009 at 8:15 pm

The statuary reminds me of the absolutely enormous (monumental in the true sense of the word) Völkerschlachtdenkmal, just outside of Leipzig in Germany. It was built in 1913 on the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Nations against Napoleon. It was the turning point in the Napoleonic Wars, and the largest battle in Europe before WWI. Pictures at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%B6lkerschlachtdenkmal

(cut and paste–I don’t know how to put links in)

Fitting for Memorial Day

Nancy says:
May 25, 2009 at 8:28 pm

What Bridey said. AND ’nuff said.

DryOwlTacos says:
May 25, 2009 at 11:31 pm

I, for one, think the Defenders of the Water Tower are teh awesome!
(To use a currently popular turn of phrase.)

shesnailie says:
May 26, 2009 at 12:03 am

_@_v – hey al… why don’t you just blame it all on the jewish world domination conspiracy scheme and be done with it?

HelloBall says:
May 26, 2009 at 12:05 am

To complete the triumvirate, ditto, and ditto again. I am deeply thankful to the US armed forces that make it possible for Al, Neenee, and, indeed, all preening blowhards everywhere to enjoy a safe and blessedly peaceful Memorial Day.

mediumwave says:
May 26, 2009 at 12:14 am

“I, ___, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.” (Emphasis added.)

grs says:
May 26, 2009 at 12:36 am

The men who flew the planes into the Twin Towers on 9/11 were crusaders. Let us not encourage that mindset.

Wow. I wouldn’t have thought to equate the water-tower figure with the 9-11 terrorists. I am blinded by the insight.
exgeeeye says:
May 26, 2009 at 5:53 am

The oath I took four times (renewed at each enlistment/re-enlistment) is still operative as far as I'm concerned.

Patrick says:
May 26, 2009 at 6:45 am

For those of you who like to bash our country's military, please remember this: It is them who have allowed you to do so without fear of persecution, prosecution, and possibly execution. Just remember that the next time you want to bad-mouth the military.

bellczar says:
May 26, 2009 at 6:51 am

Candy cigarettes are illegal in Minnesota. If you look closely at the packaging, all it says is candy. The cigarette part is only in the mind.

rick mcginnis says:
May 26, 2009 at 7:22 am

I'm always envious of someone else's PCCs – Toronto cashiered its fleet over 20 years ago. Sold them to Egypt, I believe, and replaced them with these awful things that say “80s” faster than Martha Quinn and Flock Of Seagulls. They're due to be replaced, oddly (don't know why the PCCs have lasted so much longer,) and we're due for a set of those low-slung, European accordion cars soon. Don't know why I'm not more excited, really.

And James, I need to know – did you BUY the pack of Victory candy cigs?

Patrick says:
May 26, 2009 at 10:21 am

I think it's illegal all over the country to market them as “candy cigarettes”, and to manufacture them to look like cigarettes, complete with “lit” (dyed red-orange) tips and “filters” (dyed orange) on the opposite ends. Nowadays they're marketed as “candy sticks”, and I'm surprised to see those boxes. Most of the ones I've seen down here in Georgia look nothing like parodies of bygone cigarette brands (are Luckies still available? Haven't seen them around here), but rather emblazoned with the likenesses (crude ones, usually) of some not-so-popular cartoon character like Popeye, Bluto, or one of the creations from the Hanna-Barbera cartoon factory.

Patrick says:
May 26, 2009 at 10:25 am

Also, I remember when I was a kid a friend introducing me to the candy cigarettes, and they had the “lit” tips. That same year, another friend gave me a bubble gum cigar. You blew through one end, and a puff of “smoke” (powdered sugar) came out the other end. He gave it to me on the bus on the way to school, and by the time we got to school, all the powdered sugar had been puffed out. I had read somewhere that the companies that made these managed to stop Congress from passing a law making the products completely illegal, but there was a compromise: quit making them look like the real
deal, and quit marketing them as candy versions of the pack-o-nails or lung spikes. Supposedly the candy versions made kids want to try the real thing. I never wanted to, never did, and never will.

**Jeff** says:
May 26, 2009 at 11:12 am

Everytime you start posting photos of the twin cities area, I start thinking about Emma Bull's novel “War for the Oaks.”

I believe one of the locations was that water tower.

**GardenStater** says:
May 26, 2009 at 12:45 pm

Al, you can be a real pain in the ass sometimes. Honestly.

Go to moveon.org, and post your political heavings there.

**Jessie** says:
May 26, 2009 at 3:41 pm

‘Victory Candy Cigarettes’ are still available where I dwell. There is a candy called ‘Satellite Waffers’ from the early 50s that I don’t see anymore and would like to see around again. They were small, flat, round little discs with candy beads inside. The outside was mad out of ‘cone’, as in ice-cream cone material. They were peculiar candies, and they were really good.

**Patrick** says:
May 26, 2009 at 8:13 pm

Jessie:

You mean these?

**Phouchg** says:
May 26, 2009 at 10:48 pm

If you like classic pinball, next time you are in Las Vegas hop in your rental car and head to [http://www.pinballmuseum.org/](http://www.pinballmuseum.org/)

**Vader** says:
May 27, 2009 at 4:45 pm

Spent some time this Memorial Day visiting with the nice couple that lived across the street when I was growing up, whose teenage daughter was my first babysitter. And another couple where the husband was an outstanding tenor in my church choir. A man who, with his wife, watched over my siblings and I when my parents rushed out of town to my grandmother’s funeral. A classmate of my younger sister she found irritating. The nice couple who ran our town’s little radio station for decades. My fourth-grade teacher. One of my classmates I don’t remember all that well but at least recognized as a classmate. My wife’s brother’s father-in-law. And many others.

They were nice visits, but the conversations were rather one-sided.
If this morning seems a tough job after the mercifully elongated weekend, consider: three days to Friday.

Been a while since I bored you dead with all the deets, so: Friday I was outside laboring on the Oak Island Water Feature when the phone rang. I missed the call. I wouldn't have taken it anyway. Once you decide to clean out thestenchtastic leaves and grot and filth you don't stop. When I checked caller ID I saw it was my sister. Checked my cell: call, message, text message. Uh oh. The last text message had a phone number for the cardiac ward at a hospital in Fargo.

Oh, crap. I called the number; they put me through; my dad answered – cheerfully. He was fine. Had to have a stent replaced. They'd discovered a slight problem when he went into take a physical for his haz-mat transportation license. Yes: at age 82, he's still driving the semis. Why? Because they're his by-God semis, that's why. He had to stay overnight, and this annoyed the hell out of him. He's the sort of fellow who's always doing something; come the evening, yes, a soft chair and a football game is good, but spending all day in a damned hospital bed with a TV bolted on the wall is hell. My sister said he wasn't watching TV, but just sitting there irritated he wasn't out, doing something. Cutting grass, maybe. Give the man a full tank and he'd Alvin-Straight a lane to Canada.

This weekend my daughter had to get busy on her Neighborhood Guide,
since it's due Friday. Of course we're behind. I hear from my wife that many
parents are taking this very, very seriously, and taking the kid here and there
to interview policemen, firemen, restaurant workers, et cetera, as per the
Extra Credit. I suppose that's a fine idea, and I'm all for parental involvement,
but this is not a competition, and I suspect an excess of parental input will
make the finished product look like something other than a third-grader's
work. I was not going to be that parent. I would, however, proof the copy,
offer suggestions, rotate the photos, and other incidentals. First thing: the
cover. I offered some font suggestions and let her design it as she pleased.

When I returned, I discovered she had set it in Hobo. I hate Hobo. Hobo says
many things: the 70s; ersatz corporate groovy; default Windows fonts. It's the
font you see when someone does a flier for a party that may include a clown.
I loathe Hobo

"It doesn't matter," she said. "It's just a font."

Teachable moment, as they say. I tried to explain why some fonts are apt and
some don't work. Fonts say things on their own.

Rolled eyes. "It's just a FONT, Dad."

No, it's not just a font. It's an instrument. Think of the words as notes, and the
fonts as instruments. A melody sounds differently when you play it on a tuba
or a flute, right?

"But they're letters. They don't make a sound."

"No, but they speak to me anyway."

Rolled eyes. "Fine."

Other than that, it's her project. Sorry, but no daughter of mine uses Hobo in a
class project.

We drove around and took pictures, a few of which were posted below. Much
fun. Afterwards we drove deep into the exurbs for a little dinner gathering at
her piano teacher's house, where a brilliant young kid played flamenco
guitar on the porch. Home-schooled. Arranges his own stuff; wants to go into
economics. As I twittered at the time: ah the culturally destitute burbs, with
the sound of an expertly strummed guitar floating over the golf course
behind the house. Good thing the street wasn't a cul-de-sac, or people might
have come out with pitchforks. Stop that art there! This is the suburbs! Only
grey, materialistic lives are permitted here!

On the way back, the sun was setting behind an old church graveyard. All the
flowers on the headstones glowed.
Saturday night we went to the grocery store, and I saw something that just made me laugh:

If there's two things I don't connect, it's cereal and hair.

I bought my usual, which is Fiber One, a new cereal that promises so much fiber you'll feel like you had a Chore Boy pad dragged through your intestines. Imagine my surprise when I was watching a movie hours later and saw this:

 Been around longer than I thought. That's from the great “Manhunter,” one of my favorite 80s movies. I see something new every time. This viewing it was the appearance of Chris Elliot in an FBI conference, which means there's a direct cultural connection between Hannibal Lecter and the Bob and Ray show. Amazing. But I was talking about our Saturday night. We went to Perkins, one of our Daddy-Daughter things. This sign was taped to the register. Your Checks, We Can Not Has Them:
I love that. Someone tried their best. You can understand the thinking – announce the subject first, provide a helpful illustration that somehow personalized the matter, add some arrows to indicate the evolution of the policy. What plagues me is the possibility that thought went into the line breaks.

Thence to the mall. I added some photos for my “recession” tagged collection:

It used to a clothing store called “Oak Tree” – unfortunate Morris Day overtones there – and I recall its fine shirts and horrid ties. But 89% of all men’s ties are ugly. It’s a way of making you congratulate yourself for ability to choose among the 11%. Oak Tree was replaced by a Jacuzzi store, now gone. Next door was a “San Francisco Music Box” store, which perhaps was not elegantly poised to survive the downturn. An organic dog-treats store
seemed ready to occupy the space, but it never fully materialized. Downstairs is another expanse of drywall – the Crate & Barrel store decamped for a nearby high-scale mall, a hard blow to the mall. In party terms, it's like the hip early-30s something guest leaving at 9 PM because she's tired and has an early morning ahead.

Once home, we had a sweet night. I wrote my novel and Natalie wrote her story. Hard to tell her to go to bed when she's typing away and full of fiction. The next morning she woke before I did, and was delighted to see I'd bought Star Trek Eggos.

“I had a CAPTAIN KIRK EGGO,” she announced when I stumbled down for breakfast.

Hand-crafted nerds, made in small batches. 😊

**No, I don't want** to go back to work. That was a perfect weekend in all respects, ending as many Memorial Day usually ends: in the Crazy Uke’s backyard, watching all the kids play, eating brats, setting the world's problems. (We were alarmed by the Nork nuke test but reassured that strongly-worded condemnations were being crafted as we spoke. Possibly additional measures, too.)

A few years past we used to meet at the Uke's for Labor Day, so the end of the event, and the long drive home, was always tinged with end-of-summer rue. Still have that feeling driving back. Perhaps it's the long weekend ending, but I had that all-is-not-well feeling that gnaws in the bottom of your stomach sometimes. It's a relief to remember I get that now and then for reasons great and mean; don't we all? But it's no relief to realize that sometimes all isn't well.

Sometimes I wonder how much of the current situation was due to an unexpressed, unrecognized societal desire to get the good times over and let the bogeymen get on with it, as we know they will some day. I remember Bob Davis talking about 2012 on the radio – not the silly Mayan world-ending stuff, but the idea of a moment that cracks the old paradigms across its knee. He said we were half-wanting it to come, since so many felt that whatever we were doing was just played out. You can only go to the home decoration store for throw pillows so many times. Perhaps, but I think that's middle-age talking. My paradigms are not those of someone in their 20s, necessarily. Then again, they're not those of my peers, in many cases. It's all relative. The ground is shifting under your feet; the days to come are always gathering in the wind in the trees. Just because you don’t notice it day to day doesn’t mean it isn't happening. Figure out a way to keep this stone from rolling around the sun, and we might change that, but otherwise, no.

Worry is your mind's way of saying you're not ready.

So get ready, then. That includes summer. Here it is: it's lovely.
Low update schedule this week. Stop by now and then; or check the twitter feed. See you soon.

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53 RESPONSES TO tuesday, may 26

Baby M says:
May 26, 2009 at 10:50 pm

I'm old enough to remember the 1970s, and to have done some graphics work in the back half of the decade with dry transfer letters. Bookman Bold Italic, anyone?

Lileks says:
May 26, 2009 at 11:01 pm

Where's that? Some old thread? Been too busy to police the back alleys.

Ross says:
May 27, 2009 at 2:36 am

Baby M:
I _still_ miss LettraSet. Although, I would love to have tried what my commercial-artist brother was using before the days of computer generated graphics: waxed letters. So cool–you could make a permanent layout, yet change individual elements at need.
This day completely got away from me, running down the alley, laughing and kicking trash cans. It began with the usual dash to the office to the usual 80s tunes on the usual 80s channel. ZZ Top again. A song about an unusual woman who has legs, and unlike the rest of us who drag ourselves along on our torsos, she knows how to use them. I love that song. I keep wanting to tweet that I feel as useful as ZZ Top’s drummer, but that’s not entirely fair. He was invaluable. I just remember how sad he looked in the videos when he had to play electronic drums, and the other boys got to play with spinning guitars.

Just realized for the 94835th time that I think, but am not sure, that John Fleck, the performance artist who was the personal secretary in the first season of “Murder One” was the simpering shoe salesmen in “Legs,” and feel obligated to check YouTube to see.

Ah, Wikipedia to the rescue. It was him. We can move on. Except it bears noting that all three members turn 60 this year. They start a tour in a few months.

(I love ZZ Top.)

Did the NewsBreak, then did some buzz.mn work for today and tomorrow. Mostly listened to news about the new SCOTUS nominee. There’s one quote that filled my heart with lead, but I want to get some context before I screed away on the matter. Picked up child from bus stop, and she said she had to
write a story for school. She knocked it off in ten minutes. She's forbidden me to excerpt her work online, but I think I can get away with quoting one line from the story she wrote today: “When she felt herself falling out the window, she knew she was as dead as a pig at dinner.” It was a class assignment – tell a fairy tale. In her tale a girl falls out a window, and is caught by a shadow.

Now I know how Kingsley Aims felt, in the not-being-Kingsley-Aims-level sense.

**The evening was full:** piano lesson, then picking up Mommy at the airport. Hence the brevity of this. Before piano we ate at Sonic; a new one opened in our immediate burb. It's popular. How popular?

*Wars* have staging areas, I thought. But this is where they prepare people to enter the Sonic Experience. This only being Tuesday, we got in to a stall and engaged in the timeless American delight of eating hamburgers in the car. The view out the window was sad:
Good luck, missy. I expect the shake is cinnamon-flavored, but I wonder how many people will infer this from CINO.

Wendy's doesn't have a staging area.

Wendy's *never* had a staging area.

Look at that logo, if you will; cast your eyes upon it, and despair. It can't shake its Hee-Haw heritage. Plain honest good ol'-fashioned country hamburgers! In the fast-food genre, I think Wendy's has a better chance of serving up an edible burger than McD or BK, both of which push sodden meat-pods, and few will hold their best above the In-N-Out or Fatburger chains, or even Johnny Rockets. I wonder if they fear slipping into Hardens territory, though. No matter how good the food was the last time you tried it, you always feel as though you have to convince yourself to go back, even when the other options are obviously inferior.

It's the square hamburger, that's what it is. Americans are ambivalent about hamburgers with right angles. Memories of sliders past. If Proust had bit into a White Castle instead of a madelaine, he would have written two pages about a frat party and left it at that.
**Coming up today**, despite all the protestations that this week will be light:

Comic sins around eleven, Small Town Website around noon, and something else if I can fix the code and keep the page from being 9000 pixels long. I'd give you a hint, but you might google it.

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**86 RESPONSES TO *wednesday, may 27***

**swschrad** says:
**May 27, 2009 at 10:40 am**

ZZ Top
no barber's dream
ruffled hair
just makes 'em scream.

now that's out of the way (OK, good ol' Texas “private club” rock ‘n' roll, hold my longneck and watch this hockey table scream!) best hamburgers I ever had were the ones fried with onion slices at a grill in the Universal Building in Fargo. slid right out in an hour or two, but man, were those tasty!

the fries, not.

got a few bowling alleys in the twin cities that have nice waffle fries, the burgers are average.

the fast joints are massively overprocessed and have little character that the special sauce doesn't add.

---

**swschrad** says:
**May 27, 2009 at 10:43 am**

didn't see the reference above until posting.

I would about kill for an extra-spicy box of Popeye's chicken with cajun fries and a large strawberry pop right about now.

there is a reason that Najarian was the one who brought two locations to the Twin Cities. it's called “a feeder” in hospital parlance.

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**DryOwlTacos** says:
**May 27, 2009 at 11:20 am**

Whataburger trumps all. End of discussion.

ZZ Top was just a little band from Texas in the early 70s, but boy howdy, did they rock. My all-time favorite, song and video, is “Sharp Dressed Man.”

I admire the Mac, and I own an iPhone. But I prefer Windows, because it does not presume to correct me as I type, thinking that I MEANT “Aims” when I was typing “Amis,” or “Hardens” when I was typing “Hardees” (to cite another example). It's the only thing I hate.
about my iPhone, and there's no way to turn it off.

**GardenStater** says:
May 27, 2009 at 11:24 am

Best burger, aside from those at the Heart Attack Grill, is the Whataburger. Yum! Shame they don't have them here in the Garden State.

Of course, I have access to the amazing White Manna:  
http://www.roadfood.com/Restaurant/Reviews/6392/white-manna

**WalterPeck** says:
May 27, 2009 at 11:45 am

I knew I would be late to the Wendy's Defense Initiative, but I will always go there as long as they have that spicy chicken sammich. I ate those every damn day for lunch for a year in college. So good.

**jeischen** says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:05 pm

I saw ZZ Top during their last tour two summers ago at an outdoor amphitheater. Stray Cats (!!!) and The Pretenders opened for them. Great show but I would have much preferred to have seen them 30 years ago. Much more bluesy. I'm not a big fan of anything they did after their Deguello album. Their morphing into their electronic sound turned me off, despite the twirling guitars schtick. But those boys could still rock.  
My dad was an Air Force veterinarian. He didn't inspect fast food joints on the base as there were none in 1960-62. Though he did inspect the local slaughterhouses and dairies around Columbus, MS. And kept the SAC base German Shepard security dogs healthy.

**rbj** says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:11 pm

Even after having worked at a Wendy's one summer in college, I will still go there to eat, about once a year. Which is more than the clown and that creepy king put together.

**JohnMM** says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:12 pm

Boy I messed up. DerKase is correct, Diamond Age has Colonel Sanders. Mafia owned pizza is the fast food of choice in Snow Crash

Back on topic- There is a scene at the end of the legs video, where the newly hot girl and her boyfriend get into a dune buggy. She gives him this look that could melt glass. I haven’t seen the video in 20 years (going to youtube now) and I still remember it. Does anyone else miss high heels with ankle socks?

**NeonCat** says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:17 pm

The only time I ever ate at a Whataburger was when I visited Denton, TX. Perhaps it was an outlier, but it was godawful and I will never eat at Whataburger again. Similarly, my family's bad experience with the local Sonic pretty much shoves them off my
radar, even if the commercials are occasionally funny.

Personally, I prefer Five Guys to Fatburger. If I want something late at night, though, I will go to Wendy's unless it's really, really late, in which case the 24 hr McD's down the street will get my business. Hardee's big burgers are very good, IIRC. There's not one close to me so I haven't visited them in a while.

I think the only regional chains in Atlanta are Chick-Fil-A and Krystal's. CFA is top notch, Krystal's... Well, no one will ever accuse them of selling health food. At least the last time I went to one the fries had improved. They used to have the worst fries...

Dr. Spyn says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:20 pm

Keep encouraging Natalie's writing. She's displayed more talent [in the small samples you've provided] than "writers" three times her age.

For a short time I was involved with the Other Worlds Writing Workshop, an online writing critique group. Nat's efforts are far superior to the craptacular junk with which those "writers" insulted paper.

Mr_Lilacs says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:21 pm

I like Chik-fil-A's chicken plenty, and the unsweet tea and lemonade. Their problem is a lack of any tolerable side dishes.

Bill McNuttsays:
May 27, 2009 at 12:41 pm

Sides – The Rendevous in Memphis serves you mandatory sides. You will have the coleslaw.

Bill
http://willstuff.wordpress.com

Bill Lutz says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:43 pm

Hmmm... I used to eat at Wendy's a lot more than I do now. I don't know what it is, but they seem to have gone downhill to some extent in recent years. My biggest complaint is that they got rid of the Deluxe Double Stack (the one with the special sauce) and replaced it with the current mediocre version. With that said, they still have the fastest drive-thru in town here (if I go late at night I can be in and out in two minutes flat) and I'll agree with other people's assessment of the Spicy Chicken Sandwich above.

To be honest, I'm not sure what to make of Sonic these days. I'm pretty sure if there was one in the neighborhood here I'd probably be less inclined to stop in regularly, but if I happen to be somewhere that has one (which at this point is several hundred miles away from here still, but they're gradually getting closer) I'd make a point to seek it out. I grew up in a town that had one, and always liked the chili-cheese coneyes and some of the drinks. As far as drive-ins go, we've got a really good local one called Burgemaster here, and nine times out of ten I'll go for that over Fatburger. I also happen to like Red Robin, although that's more of a place to go to hang out with
people than to go to eat.

**Preptile** says:
May 27, 2009 at 12:44 pm

Now I feel old. Juanito, above, mentions ZZ Top over the decades. He missed one.
ZZ Top, then alternately known as the Coachmen, or the Electras, played at a local church gym. Teen Canteen. Unknown kids from alternate denominations mobbed the place. Best Church. Ever. 1964.
They and a previous band member would eventually attend my HS.
We cut our teeth on those early excursions into the enemy territory that was occupied by the opposite sex there. No one over 14 was admitted.
The end of the evening brought a slow song. It wasn’t the song for ‘leg’ men.
One hoped at that time to be held in such esteem as to happen upon contact w the bumperage adorning our local adorables.
The chaperons, who had well announced standards, were mostly correct in their assumptions that most of the antedees would be so sweaty as to repulse attempts at physical contact. They were also vastly outnumbered and only full lighting would dissuade the more passionate. Parents were called.
And careers were started.

**Charlie Foxtrot** says:
May 27, 2009 at 1:23 pm

Being a devoted Bleat reader on the west coast has its disadvantages; usually, everyone else has logged on and thoroughly elucidated upon any and all aspects of Mr. Lileks’ latest by the time I roll out of bed.

When the subject – even briefly – turns to cheeseburgers in general and In-n-Out specifically, however, I feel a compulsion to comment: There are no better burgers. (Lest anyone assume that I am merely a corporate shill, I solemnly attest and avow that I am not now nor have I ever been in the paid service of any fast-food enterprise.)
Fresh ingredients, generous sizes and unique sponge bread buns make them exceptionally delicious. I would like to share a secret with HT (above) and others who find IOB’s standard fries less than satisfying: they can be ordered “well done,” and the cook will let a batch simmer in the fryer just long enough to crisp them nicely. Our local does this extremely well.

They tell us we’ll be getting Sonics in the neighborhood soon, and being an open-minded sort, I’ll be sure to evaluate them. I expect that if they are even slightly better than In-n-Out I will be unable to convey my esteem, having succumbed at first bite and been transported instantaneously and euphorically to Burger Nirvana.

**Nalora** says:
May 27, 2009 at 1:33 pm

Mmmm Sonic lime-aides. Sonic was born in my home state, btw.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
May 27, 2009 at 2:06 pm
Charlie Foxtrot Says:
May 27th, 2009 at 1:23 pm

Being a devoted Bleat reader on the west coast has its disadvantages;

As a fellow west coaster(?) there are some advantages as well. If the following day's posts show up between midnight and 1:00AM (East Coast time) then we can use the West Coast time machine to read those posts at 9:00 – 10:00PM the day prior. Tragically, at those times I am usually running maintenance tasks over several networks and reviewing logs, but prior to the current incarnation of the Bleat (back in the days of single long form posts) I would peer into the time machine to see if I could read tomorrow's news TODAY! Plus, I'd get to download the Diner on Thursday and listen to it before Friday.

IrritableBear says:
May 27, 2009 at 3:11 pm

Irritable Bear has legs, and knows how to use them. They're good for standing to find honey and for running.

blivet says:
May 27, 2009 at 3:19 pm

John Fleck also played a recurring character on Enterprise.

Kevin says:
May 27, 2009 at 4:58 pm

“If Proust had bit into a White Castle instead of a madeleine, he would have written two pages about a frat party and left it at that.” Wow. Wow. I frequently send things like this around to friends and colleagues as examples of our host's off-hand brilliance, but this one is going into the archives. Then again, “as dead as a pig at dinner” is pretty terrific, too.

Hugh says:
May 27, 2009 at 5:14 pm

CINO also stands for “Conservatives In Name Only”

Shelley says:
May 27, 2009 at 6:09 pm

You must mean Kingsley Amis. Actually, I just finished cataloging his personal library. The only way I know how to feel like Kingsley Amis is to be a misogynist, lecherous drunk that somehow manages to be charming enough win over beautiful women.

There just had to be something endearing about him.

RR Ryan says:
May 27, 2009 at 6:33 pm

It may have been mentioned already: one of the ZZ Top's plays Angela's father on “Bones”. She even tells her friends when they're locked in the lab at Christmas that they may recognize him, but to please ignore it.
Lileks says:
May 27, 2009 at 7:04 pm

That he did – one of the Temporal Cold War guys. Slightly ashamed I know that. But only slightly.

Lileks says:
May 27, 2009 at 7:15 pm

The Wives, as they were known, consisted of two Playboy Playmates – Jeana Tomasino, and Kymberly Herrin – and Danièle Arnaud, who's now a French instructor at a California culture. So says wikipedia.

I'd wager you're thinking of the first Wife. 😛

Mike Gebert says:
May 27, 2009 at 8:55 pm

Sonicmania is inexplicable to me, but we had it when they opened in the Chicago burbs, too. I grew up in Kansas with Sonic around (actually I went to high school with the kids of the guy who relaunched it and took it national) and it was never any big deal. Vista was better. (You can go to the last surviving one, in Topeka I think, and see for yourself.) As far as I'm concerned, there's only one good use for a Sonic, and that's to get a cherry limeade on a hot summer day. They nail that one.

Baby M says:
May 27, 2009 at 9:29 pm

One of my distant cousins met ZZ Top in a bar in Columbus about 2 years ago and played pool with them. She is a bit older than me, outside the ZZ Top target demographic, and she had no idea who they were–didn't find out until a day or two later. She said they were nice guys, but they couldn't stop teasing her for not knowing who they were.

Mr Michael says:
May 27, 2009 at 11:10 pm

Quick tip to Brian Lutz: We have a Sonic now! South Hill Puyallup, on Meridian. Fear the Staging area...

Kev says:
May 27, 2009 at 11:24 pm

I saw Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top in a downtown Dallas (the late Sambuca in Deep Ellum, for those in the know). He was with a huge party; not sure how much he was listening to the music in there, but it was great jazz that night. The club was dark enough that he even took off his (probably not cheap) sunglasses for a while.

@DryOwlTacos: Try Settings/General/Keyboard on your iPhone, and you ought to be able to turn off the auto-correct function. (This works on my 3G; not sure if yours is an older model.)

Continental Op says:
May 27, 2009 at 11:53 pm
A guy that posts on a message board that I frequent had a father who was a musician based out of San Antonio. He recently posted a collection of memorabilia from his father's career. One of the photos included a pre-beard Billy Gibbons (on the right):

http://i299.photobucket.com/albums/mm295/cajunhorn/sc000a11cf.jpg

Tom Stiff says:
May 28, 2009 at 12:05 am

I don’t think li'l ol’ Wendy has a lot to worry about. The newness of Sonic will wear off soon enough. I have one a mile from my house and I patronize it maybe once every two months. I’ve hit the Wendy’s in my neighborhood two or three times this week. The kids LOVE the double stack cheeseboigies for 99 cents. If you close your eyes, they actually remind me of Steak ‘n' Shake.

Ross says:
May 28, 2009 at 1:15 am

Once Burger Chef disappeared, we didn’t go to fast-food joints much, aside from an occasional stop at a great old A&W in Thiensville (on the way home from the farmer relatives). We actually liked going up to Port Washington for a fresh fish sandwich from Ewig’s better; they had a little take-out area, with plain, clean white tile & no seats. Get your food, look at Lake Michigan while you eat in the car. Wonderful.

Having said that, I do get a tooth every few years for a big ol' greasy double cheesebuger(& a banana malt) from one of our local institutions, Kopp’s Frozen Custard.

On “That Little Ol’ Band From Texas”, despite the sometimes truly bizarre get-ups that Gibbons shows up in(including a tutu and one pink nightmare that looked like the love child of a swingin’ ’60s Carnaby Street thing & grandma's bathmat–complete with matching hat & go-go boots, IIRC), they are still a great live act. The best, I think, was the “Cheap Sunglasses” Tour with the Lone Wolf Horns.

Fred says:
May 28, 2009 at 12:21 pm

NeonCat I'm sorry to hear of your bad experience at Whataburger. I've always enjoyed their consistently high quality. Now if I have a choice between Dan's/Fran's or Whataburger I'll tend to go with Fran's/Dan's but I don't know that they count as a chain with all their stores (as far as I know) only local to Austin…

Tom Stiff says:
May 28, 2009 at 4:31 pm

While I enjoy Whataburger's breakfast taquitos tremendously, their burgers are without a doubt the lowest quality of any fast-food chain that I frequent. A few months ago, I decided to try the Patty Melt that had been incessantly advertised on the radio. The meat was so full of offal that I had to throw the awful thing away (ha! see what I did there?). Come to think of it, I don’t think I’ve been back for breakfast since.

John Greene says:
May 29, 2009 at 7:14 am

The Sonic near my home that we frequent the most often (in
Houston) is also next door to a Wendy's. According to the marquee, that particular Wendy's has been “closed due to fire” now for about 9 months, since before Hurricane Ike. There is so much pathos in that parking lot that I shed a tear every time I order my Route 44 diet Dr Pepper with cherry.

**Cheaply Apodictic » Blog Archive » Great Line from Lileks** says:
May 29, 2009 at 7:18 am

[…] Writing like this is why he's got such a popular following: It's the square hamburger, that's what it is. Americans are ambivalent about hamburgers with right angles. Memories of sliders past. If Proust had bit into a White Castle instead of a madelaine, he would have written two pages about a frat party and left it at that. […]

← Older Comments
Our paper is looking down the barrel of a strike.

What's the secret of comedy, as the old joke goes? Timing. The funny part comes when you say “timing” before the other person gets a chance to answer the question, thereby you have no concept of the secret of comedy at all. Yet the horrible timing is funny in itself, like a comet hitting a planet just as it starts an intercontinental thermonuclear war. Jeff Jarvis, declaiming from the Throne of Googlympus, said today we should use the chance to bust the contracts, kill print and go digital. (It's like my novel is writing itself in my daily actual life.) Perhaps, but in a town that has another newspaper, I prefer to wave to the door and say “you first.”

Stay tuned.

Did you know the Chinese character for “Crisis” is the same as the one for “Opportunity?” Also the same as the one for “rammed up the fundament with a 36-spiked hot pole dipped in lemon juice and battery acid.” True.

**So get this.** The story of The Kind Shadow, discussed here yesterday, was sent back by the teacher with request for more detail. She had to make the story longer. It's about a girl who falls out a window, is caught by a Shadow, taken through a dark forest to a castle, where he plies her with treats before
attempting to steal her soul. Since we needed more, we had a story conference over dinner. I just asked questions. So: what more do you want to add?

*The shadow is really a prince who's had a spell cast on him.*

Why does he take the girl?

*To help him break free of the spell. She has to kill the witch who cast the spell.*

How does he tell her this? He's a shadow.

*(I thought: he has a magic mirror that shows his true self when others look into it.)*

(Pause)

*He has a mirror, and when she looks in it she sees him as he is in reality!* (Oy.)

Why does he send her to kill the witch? Why doesn't he do it?

*She is the Chosen One with a pure heart.*

So how does she do it?

*With a magic sword only she can use.*

Sorry, the witch will see her coming a mile away. Witch is sitting on the porch, kid walks up with a sword, witch knows something is up.

*She brings . . . a guillotine.*

A guillotine?

Well I was going to put it in the story but I couldn't spell it.

Okay, I don't think we're going to have a Chosen One with a pure heart dragging a guillotine through the forest. Try again.

*She has . . . Candy! But it's poison. She says it's from the witch's demon friend.*

Interesting. And what if the witch is suspicious and asks what the demon's name is?

*It's Bob.*

(Sudden shuddery Fear of Bob)

No, not Bob. What else?

*Cornelius.*

Okay, Cornelius. How does Ella know the demon's name?

*Because it's the Shadow's brother. He went to the dark side and made the witch curse his brother.*
Why didn't he do it himself?

*Because there was still some good in him, and he still loved his brother. He gives the Shadow the poison candy.*

And that was it. I just took a look at what she'd written – and TELL NO ONE, since she'll be peeved if she knows.

> While she was eating, the Shadow came over with a coral decorated mirror. What? A mirror? Ella thought. The shadow set it down and stared deep into it. Ella gasped. *The reflection – it wasn't a shadow at all. It was a prince!* His suit was pure white and his cuffs were sun-gold. *His eyes were leaf green and his hair was as brown as soil.*

Superstition, feudal class systems – man, I thought we'd left this stuff behind years ago. 😛

**Maybe not.** I enjoyed this story: maybe we should paint all our roofs white to forestall the inevitable climate catastrophe. And oil up the barn doors, while we're at it.

I'd be curious to see what percentage of the United States consists of *roofs*. I think it's rather small. But it's an interesting idea, inasmuch as it isn't going to happen, but will be talked about in serious tones. These things invariably lead to excitable public servants coming back – via jet, of course – from a really exciting convention where there was just a *lot* of positive energy about change, and then the officials commission a White Roof Study, which leads to someone commissioning a White Roof Commission, which leads to outreach, consciousness raising, and a total of 145 white roofs in town – and *this* leads to a newspaper story about the Growing Trend towards white roofs. A few city buildings are painted; the mayor is on hand for each. They look filthy after six months. One day in July passersby are treated to the site of city workers hosing down the roof in the middle of a drought.

Reminded me of this story from Blighty. It helps if you imagine John Cleese delivering the news, and Jim Royle shouting BURPING SHEEP MY AHSS at the telly:

> Government advisers are developing menus to combat climate change by cutting out “high carbon” food such as meat from sheep, whose burping poses a serious threat to the environment.

Excuse me: burping sheep are the environment. Burping sheep are natural. Ah, but we raise too many to eat, so they're not natural. But it would be natural, I guess, if there was a parasite that flourished at the expense of sheep's predators, leading to a temporary increase in gross sheepage until the situation rebalanced. But everything that rebalances the old unbalances the new. There is no balance in the long run. Balance is an illusion you get when...
you don't live to an age of 125 million years.

Once again I say: any planet whose ecosystem can be wrecked by burping sheep deserves it. Darwin on a galactic scale. Man up, Mother Earth. But the article raises some other foes:

Out will go kebabs, greenhouse tomatoes and alcohol. Instead, diners will be encouraged to consume more potatoes and seasonal vegetables, as well as pork and chicken, which generate fewer carbon emissions.

Well, I like chicken, and I don't care much for lamb, so HOLD ON A MINUTE, ALCOHOL?

Alcoholic drinks are another significant contributory factor, with the growing and processing of crops such as hops and malt into beer and whisky helping to generate 1.5% of the nation's greenhouse gases.

China will vomit out in perpetuity enough greenhouse gases to make a Venusian suspect he's having an asthma attack, and wee Britain will be filled with nothing more than small pale people sitting in shabby rooms having a wee dram with the shades down, lest the neighbor's Karbon Kid Patrol Member does a spot-check of the bins for whiskey bottles. You get one per year. It's registered to you, so don't think you can break it and hide the pieces. Each bottle has a unique signature in the glass, tied to your carbon account.

(Yes, I know, reducto ad ridiculouso – but the people who roll their eyes when I tease them with these scenarios usually turn out to be the ones who think there should be carbon accounts. But somehow it's paranoid to take them at their word.)

More:

The Carbon Trust, a government-funded firm, is working with food and drink companies to calculate the "carbon footprints" of products – sometimes with surprising results.

Sorry, but after reading “The Carbon Trust, a government-funded firm,” nothing will surprise me.

Today: Lance Lawson over at buzz.mn, and if all goes well, Black and White World will make a late appearance. As I said, everything's delayed this week. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a column to write. See you soon.
79 RESPONSES TO *Thursday, May 28*

**MikeH** says:
May 28, 2009 at 1:17 pm

When I first read about 20% of the earth is roofs, I kept thinking only 20% of the population had a roof over their head, so everyone else lives in the open? Then I realized earth's surface that was being talked about. My meds are as little too effective today.

**roger h (bgbear)** says:
May 28, 2009 at 1:25 pm

We need to nuke the Sun.

**Algen** says:
May 28, 2009 at 1:33 pm

Let's see now. We need to paint all roofs to 1. Bounce the sun's rays back into space. Oops They are already under the greenhouse gasses so they would actually be trapped by said gasses and make things worse. That is if the roofs could somehow be kept perfectly perpendicular to the sun's rays so that the rays were bounced upward. Fail ! 2. White roofs will reduce the energy required to cool the buildings during hot weather. Oops It takes more energy to heat buildings in cold weather than it does to cool them in hot weather. Proper insulation reduces energy consumption both in hot or cold conditions. Fail ! In some instances having all roofs a light color will reduce the ambient temperature of the area. Such as in heavily built up areas. IE large cities or industrial areas. Just more Moon Battery from our elite socialist betters. Obama Knows

**MRNUTTY** says:
May 28, 2009 at 1:35 pm

Why the sudden need for 'smilies'? It's so incongruous.

**D Palmer** says:
May 28, 2009 at 1:49 pm

Are sheep really a major food source? I mean, lamb now and again, but I can't recall ever eating an actual adult sheep. Plus, while I don't think sheep are a major source of food (at least in the US) they are a major source of renewable clothing material (wool) however, so less sheep means more goats, or more cotton cultivation, which requires more water usage, pesticides, fertilizer, and of course more gas for tractors and harvesters. So really, less sheep really doesn't help the environment.

**Continental Op** says:
May 28, 2009 at 1:57 pm

“Did you know the Chinese character for ‘Crisis’ is the same as the one for ‘Opportunity?’”

If you’re Homer Simpson, that’s a “crisitunity!”
Headless Unicorn Guy says:
May 28, 2009 at 2:15 pm

Officials of “The Carbon Trust, a Government-funded Company”, Government Officials, and Inner Party Members are doubleplusexempt from these regulations, of course.

“We don’t watch our Carbon Footprint! Only the Little People watch their Carbon Footprint!”
– Leona Helmsley

P.S. I live in a hot climate, and light-colored roofs DO make sense. During the summers we get, you want to bounce as much as possible of the sun heat BEFORE it gets inside — light-colored roofs, shadecloth awnings, window film, etc. Reduces your A/C load a bit.

Headless Unicorn Guy says:
May 28, 2009 at 2:16 pm

Roofs globally are a very small percetage of total area so it would do almost nothing. But since the earth is actually cooling right now they can say it worked. — Wisconsinite

The Party Is Never Wrong.
The Party Can Never Be Wrong.
Ees Party Line, Comrade.

Ella says:
May 28, 2009 at 2:45 pm

Can I say how happy I am that the heroine in your daughter's story is named Ella? I've always been fond of my name. Glad it's getting some love. 😊

crossdotcurve says:
May 28, 2009 at 5:37 pm

Sorry to intrude with…you know…facts and stuff. Is the reality-based community welcome here?


What the hey. Snark trumps science for some people I guess.

Gabriel Hanna says:
May 28, 2009 at 7:02 pm

Steven Chu won the Nobel for physics, and the white roofs idea is the sort of thing a physicist thinks of. The Earth's average temperature has to do with how much radiation it absorbs from the sun. Putting carbon dioxide in the air increases the absorption, and painting roofs white would lower it, because the Earth would be a little more reflective. There is a very simple equation that describes this (the Stefan-Boltzmann law) and it applies to anything that receives and emits radiation, it's not a complicated climate model. Depending on where you are on the reflectivity-temperature curve, you could change temperature a lot, or a little, by a small change like painting roofs white (reflectivity is proportional to the 4th power of temperature).

It's kind of like saying that if you add more cream to coffee the
coffee gets more white. But for a long time the cream is going to swirl around in the coffee—and this is like what climate modellers are trying to calculate, and this is why they need the complicated models. But nobody needs a complicated model to tell them that EVENTUALLY you will have a uniform cafe-au-lait color that depends on how much cream you put in.

**HT says:**
May 28, 2009 at 7:28 pm

So you steered her away from a demon's name with solid “literary” underpinnings (Twin Peaks: Bob) to the name of the rebellious “monkey” in Planet of the Apes? Or maybe you guys just really hate the Vanderbilts. Either way, kind of a letdown.

**Hop Head says:**
May 28, 2009 at 7:58 pm

I am for placing a fart limit on vegans. Instead of giving the “carbon credit” money to Al Gore (so he can jet around in his private plane—hypocrite), we can fund a study to produce “low methane” veggies!

**John Hinds says:**
May 28, 2009 at 9:16 pm

I love it when you go off on the idiotocracy.

**markstorer.com » Blog Archive » Just like James... says:**
May 28, 2009 at 11:59 pm

[...] read the whole thing. It's masterful. And, of course, right.  [...]

**Lileks says:**
May 29, 2009 at 1:11 am

If there's a more tiresomely self-flattering term than “reality-based,” I'm sure we'll hear it eventually—but yes, differing opinions are always welcome. As for snark trumping science—the article says “To give an easy example, just refitting the 30 billion or so square feet of commercial roof space in the United States would be the equivalent of taking roughly 75 million cars off the road for a year.”

I'm sure there's actual science behind that assertion, but would it be science-trumping unreality to ask for the particulars? (IF anyone's interested, the paper is [here](http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=2401).) The linked article—another Vine entry, but nevermind—says:

“As Hashem Akbari at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimated last year, if we took all the roofs and pavement in the world's large urban areas, and either painted them white or replaced the black asphalt with brighter material, thereby increasing their solar reflectivity, the global cooling effect alone would be enough to offset 44 metric gigatons of carbon-dioxide.”

Not 43? Not 45? “Brighter” material results in exactly 44 metric gigatons of offset? How “bright” does it have to be to hit 44 gigatons—or would somewhat duller material only offset 40.09254 gigatons? S Even if that's so, is it... annually? Every ten years? Every century? I'm sure there's an answer, but if you're going to offer facts ‘n' stuff, it would be helpful to have details.
I don’t mean to dismiss it all out of hand, but your “facts and stuff” seem shy on the former and heavy on the latter. The TNR article, by the way, says the offset would be “roughly equivalent to taking all the world’s cars off the road for eleven years.” This article says it would be “equivalent to taking the world’s approximately 600 million cars off the road for 18 years.” Perhaps that’s a different, all-white approach that doesn’t use dimmer asphalt.

Mr. Akbari appears to make his living from cool-roof advocacy, and that’s fine; good for him. Is anyone allowed to wonder whether his science is influenced by money? I’d say “that’s a silly question,” but that might sound like snark. And stuff.

grs says:
May 29, 2009 at 1:16 am

Is the reality-based community welcome here?

This is the reality-based community.

Sorry to intrude with...you know...facts and stuff.

Well shoot, if an assistant editor at The New Republic says it's true, that's the end of the debate.

hpoulter says:
May 29, 2009 at 4:51 am

This may be a dead thread, and Lileks’ final summary was pretty definitive, but it continues to raise questions in my mind. What are the environmental impacts of that much paint? What kind of paint will actually last on rooftops? I’m guessing Sherwin-Williams white latex is not up to it. And what lighter materials can replace asphalt roads? The only one I know of in broad use is concrete – which has big maintenance costs in northern states with freezing, especially with heavy truck use. Also “lighter materials” is a cheat – all the estimates of wonderful impacts are based on an albedo obtained from white surfaces. As far as I know, an actual white pavement is entirely impractical (“unreality-based”).

Just how much would all this cost, and how could it possibly be coordinated? Inquiring minds want to know. In the meantime, if you want to paint your own roof white, good for you. Solutions which require “All the in the country(world)” to do this or that are generally not realistic.

hpoulter says:
May 29, 2009 at 4:53 am

Hmm – edited out my brackets. Solutions which require “All the [fill in the blank] in the country(world)” to do this or that are generally not realistic.

HunkyBobTX says:
May 29, 2009 at 8:07 am

hpoulter – Well put.
Usually it's the solutions that require that all the US citizens that are put forth. Since we're apparently the font of all environmental evil in the world.

I must reject the premise that global climate change (formerly called global warming, formerly called global cooling) is significantly

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=2401
influenced by mankind. There is enough anecdotal evidence in addition to many qualified scientists disputing it that makes it at least necessary to continue research in the scientific arena and the debate in the political arena before people like Al Gore and Nancy Pelosi start to dictate policies that force everyone not part of the political class to lower their standard of living. And these are policies which will undoubtedly have unintended consequences and dubious benefits.

I think the maxim “When you are unsure do what to do, do nothing” applies here.

RJ says:
May 29, 2009 at 8:42 am

Sorry to intrude with...you know...facts and stuff. Is the reality-based community welcome here?

followed with a weak cite and then immediately by

What the hey. Snark trumps science for some people I guess.

Ahh, the irony.

IrritableBear says:
May 29, 2009 at 9:51 am

Irritable Bear is now gonna go fart in the woods before the environmentalists notice and pass a law restricting bear farting.

HT says:
May 29, 2009 at 12:07 pm

My guess is that the calculation of the benefit of white roofs incorporates the energy savings coming from having to run the air conditioners less. As someone else mentioned, the benefit only accrues in hot, sunny climates. Still sounds really ugly, expensive, and impractical, however.

< span >

A Thought From Lileks - Transterrestrial Musings says:
May 29, 2009 at 4:56 pm

[...] the correct link, for those who were scratching their [...]
journalists (not meaning James) seem never to have heard of the concept of error bars, and so when a journalist says “44 megatons” you don’t know if the number was quoted was really 44 +/- 10 or 44 +/- 1 or what.

I have seen newspaper articles that say things like “The proposed road will be about 1 kilometer (1.609344 miles)”, which is absurd. The “1 kilometer” is an estimate, it wasn’t measured to the thousandth of a millimeter.

**Gabriel Hanna** says:
May 29, 2009 at 7:27 pm

Anyway, if you are interested, the equation is

\[
\frac{1 - a}{1 - a_0} = \left(\frac{T}{T_0}\right)^4
\]

a is the reflectivity of the Earth, and a0 is the reflectivity right now (about 0.3). T is the average temperature of the Earth, and T0 is the average temperature right now (288 K, the equation doesn’t work in Fahrenheit or Celsius).

So if you want to reduce the temperature by 1%, you increase the reflectivity by 12%. (1% is way too much to drop the temperature by, btw, that’s about 6 degrees Fahrenheit, which is many times the total amount of global warming so far.)

However, I don’t know how many roofs you have to paint to increase the reflectivity by a given percentage, because at the same time the carbon dioxide in the air is increasing, and every increase reduces the reflectivity by some percentage.

As I understand this, painting X roofs white would be like taking Y tons of CO2 out of the atmosphere, one time. (Don’t ask me what X and Y are, because I don’t know.) If people keep putting CO2 in, they’d have to keep finding more things to paint white.

So roof-painting isn’t a long term solution, it’s more of a one-shot mitigation.

**HT** says:
May 29, 2009 at 9:46 pm

Gabriel: I stand corrected. I guess I just figured that no one could be so stupid (or mendacious) as to quote a one-time benefit as a continuing effect, or that anyone could believe that the amount of roofing in the US would be anything more than a rounding error on a global scale.

I read, a while ago, that everyone on earth could be given an acre of land, and the entire population of the earth could still fit inside the continent of Australia, with room left over. Since on my own parcel the roof space accounts for less than 2% of the total square footage, I’m guessing that globally the amount is more like .2%…yes?

**Gabriel Hanna** says:
May 31, 2009 at 5:41 pm

HT, as I said, it depends exactly on how much the extra reflectance of the white roofs compensates for the extra absorption of the carbon dioxide–and you don’t know the answer to that. You think it can’t amount to more than a “rounding error”, but have you done the math? Is your intuition about a subject, in which you are not expert, to be trusted? You may not think it’s plausible that time
slows down for people moving faster than you; but the GPS satellites have to correct for it, or they give you the wrong position.

I haven’t done this math, because I don’t study carbon dioxide in the atmosphere; I study noble gases, and I don’t have time enough to take away from my own field to become in another. But I know enough about general physics to understand how blackbody radiation works. It wasn’t something dreamed up by environmental activists to justify state control over the economy—the arguments for which I am just as skeptical of as you may be. It was worked out a hundred years ago for a reasons having nothing to do with climate science. It merely says that for any thermally isolated object, temperature is a function of the net power absorbed.

I for one am thankful that experts do think painting roofs could help out the climate significantly. That is far cheaper and far less bother than some of the stuff environmental activists think we should do.

absepa says:
June 1, 2009 at 8:03 am

Sorry—this comment is way late, but I’m catching up on your posts from last week.

I believe that, at this point, Natalie is a better writer than I am. (And I do business writing for a living.) Her stories are wonderful, and so well-written for an eight-year-old. I don’t blame you a bit for wanting to share them…you must be very proud.
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?
If I had time for retweet theater, I'd use this: "Breathes there a man who, against his better judgment and prior experience, has not attempted to adjust a lawn sprinkler while it's running?" (exactly 140 characters, too!) Yet we try, over and over again, thinking we will outrun the sprinkler, or avoid a spritz in the puss. This is why men identify with the Coyote, not the Roadrunner. And well we should; a canine's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's an ACME catalog for? The Coyote paid sales tax on those items, I'd wager; the Roadrunner paid no taxes for the highways he used.

At least the coyote tried to solve a problem with technology instead of running around all day like an idiot.

Speaking of which:

Another day, another giant software bundle. It's always a pleasure to download the apps, install your serial number, load them up, try them out, and forget them forevermore. Not entirely true – some of these bundles yield things I use often, and if they toss in chaff, fine. I'd been thinking of getting Parallels -

Well, therein lies a tale. Ready?

I wanted to play SimCity Societies. For one thing, its price volatility was a certain guarantee of quality:
It reminded me of SimsVille, a game Maxis killed before it was released. SimCity at the micro level. You can build small towns, float over your creations like a god, watching your sims leave their house, walk to a coffee shop. It looked charming. I don’t care about the strategy aspects; I don’t want to win. I just want to channel my inner Robert Moses and build cities to my exacting specifications. SimCity 4 wasn’t any fun, for reasons I can’t recall, and SimCity Societies isn’t designed by Maxis. But who cares: sandbox option! Build with no regard to the rules set down by The Man, man.

But it’s Windows only.

So: let’s install Windows on the Mac, then. That’s easy. Done it a few times. Haven’t wanted to, because it always leaves a dull hard-drive icon on the desktop I can’t recall, and I am **fussy** particular about my HD icons.
See? All circles! They MUST be all circles, or I cannot sleep.

So: why not remove all the HD icons from the desktop? I’ve been meaning to switch over to Quicksilver as an app launcher, anyway. So. I downloaded that, and prepared to swap out the 500GB drive for a 1 TB I bought on sale. I backed up the 500, pulled it out of the machine, and discovered I’d stripped a screw attaching the drive to the bracket.

_Hmm_. Damn. Called the Apple Store to see if they had a replacement; they did not. Online cost for the bracket: $40. No one seems to have just the screw, possibly because it’s a special Apple screw personally approved by Steve Jobs. (That’s what I love about Macs – even the things inside the machine you never see look cool.) I could go with three screws, but having dealt with unbalanced drives – tickety tickety tickety - I decided against it. So: let’s swap out the 500GB drive in bay #3. Problem: it contains 300GB of raw video data, including the unfinished family movies from the last few weeks. Solution: finish the movies, back up the data, and then swap it out. Problem: the family movie for the spring always concludes with the last day of school, with Natalie getting off the bus. That’s in June. But let’s get a head start, eh? I spent a few rare spare hours getting those movies into shape, backing up all the other files. But I wasn’t any closer to playing the game.

So . . . let’s download a trial of a program that lets you run Windows in a Virtual environment. This I do. Windows installation is painless, but Windows XP itself is the same old same – the session begins with a little balloon telling me my computer may be at risk. Click on the balloon to learn more, unless you want to click on the balloon to close the balloon, in which case click on the X part of the balloon. I dismiss it. Then a balloon telling me I have to activate Windows, a concept foreign to those of us in the Mac land. Click to dismiss. It’s like going to work and finding a clown in your cubicle, and you have to prick his balloons before you can sit down.

Ah! An alert: I am eligible for a free year of anti-virus programs. I install this, and while it downloads I am treated to pictures of people enjoying MacAfee
products. They’re all over 40, smiling at their computer, because presumably it doesn’t run like a turtle in syrup, and no longer redirects their searches to Hungarian warez sites loaded with links to trannygranny.com. I’d smile too. The software requires me to restart; I do. When the desktop reappears (quickly, I might add; no complaints there) the balloon telling me my computer might be at risk is hiding the button I should click to activate my anti-virus software. I know, I know – just a side-effect of the OS running in a small window, but it’s still amusing. I load SimCity Societies. Utter hash. Redraw problems, indicating some problem with the video card drivers; can’t blame anyone for that. So many variables.

Hmm. What now? Well, I do have an old Mac in the basement, saved for future use as a server. Perhaps it could be turned entirely to the Dark Side, and be used as a Windows machine. I could run all sorts of games.

I got it out, opened it up. I’d removed the hard drives and set them aside, each containing big archives of movies and pictures, but since the drives were dupes, I could spare one. Alas: the screws used to put them into the drive bays (a different configuration than the other Mac, of course) were gone, so the drive wouldn’t go in. I actually remembered throwing away the screws. Idiot.

But: might there be screws in box of the aforementioned unused 1 TB drive?

THERE BE SCREWS, CAP’N. I attached them to the drive, put the drive in the old Mac, but didn’t drag it upstairs. For once let’s think beyond the next step, okay? How to connect the old Mac to the monitors? Well with a cord duh, you say, but it’s not that simple. Everything in my studio is threaded though little holes in the desk. There are few visible cords. There’s no hole that would let me thread the monitor cable to the place where I’d put the Mac-Windows machine. So: extension cords. Right? Right. Unfortunately, Mac displays have their own funky pin array, possibly based on numbers in a Zen pun. But! I have an adapter. But! It doesn’t reach. But! In my bin of cords I found a cable that would do the tricks . . . except it was Male-Male. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. But I needed a gender switcher. So: the other day when we were heading to piano, I stopped at Radio Shack. They didn’t have a gender switcher. They had a cord that would do the trick, though.

Forty bucks.

The cost of the bracket. If I’d just bought the bracket, I’d be playing SimCity Societies by now.

At this point I abandoned the Mac-Windows machine idea.

So along comes this bundle with a copy of Parallels, which is a different Windows emulator than the one I used. The price of the bundle was $50, and it had all sorts of other toys. I bought it, installed it, installed Windows, and installed SimCity Societies.

Ran like a dream.
It’s not that great a game.

Wife tonight: “Why is there a computer sitting in the furnace room?”

Me: “Long story.”

—

**Interesting** day ahead. I guarantee nothing except 100 Mysteries, which is already half-done – but it will be late. I can bounce every other recurring feature, except this one. See you soon!

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**67 RESPONSES TO *friday! may 29***

**juanito - John Davey** says:
May 29, 2009 at 1:06 pm

 Bonnie._ Says:  
 May 29th, 2009 at 12:26 pm

We have a computer graveyard in the basement, under the stairs. My husband can’t bear to get rid of any computer. Yes, there’s a Commodore 64 down there. I expect the whole mess to gain self awareness at some point and assemble itself into a giant robot monster. I never clean up under there. I don’t even LOOK under there.

Your accumulated computer boneyard might develop a V’ger condition. V’ger will learn all that is learnable & transmit that information back to the Creator. Carbon Based Units should stand aside.

You might want to look under there once. Before it’s too late…

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**hpoulter** says:  
May 29, 2009 at 1:45 pm

Au contraire, Marcia – I don’t hate Macs – I think they are fine machines.

---

**Baby M** says:  
May 29, 2009 at 1:49 pm

My kids had Macs at grade school and PCs at home. They don’t much care for the Macs for some reason.

A Commodore 64 with the Lumbering Hippo 1541 drive? Old school! (I still have my ViC-20 and tape drive, so I should talk.)

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**Ed Singel** says:  
May 29, 2009 at 3:22 pm

As an engineer, I have become fluent in both Macs and PCs, although I prefer Macs (running Quicken with Parallels/WinXP, of course).
My brother, who is a software developer for Windows systems, once
told me that PCs are more user friendly. His definition of “user
friendly” is the ability to take off the cover and rip out and
reconfigure the circuit boards.

To each his own, I guess

Joe Sixpack says:
May 29, 2009 at 4:33 pm

An engineer who prefers Macs? Whisky Tango Foxtrot?
I thought engineers like to tinker.

What do you run CAD on? Crunch numbers? Play Team Fortress2?

shesnailie says:
May 29, 2009 at 6:15 pm

_@_v_/ – been a mac user since the late-90s when i found a mac
plus released in the wild. before that i had a commodore 128 –
upgraded from a C-64. also have an apple iic outfit complete with
extra floppy drive and matching greenscreen monitor – also found
in the wild.

Mikey NTH says:
May 29, 2009 at 7:00 pm

Ah! Sandbox games. Haven't done that in years, last being the Zeus
games.
I may have to run it again for fun.

Of course, then I would have to play Fighting Steel again. And re-
setup the scenario of a stormy November North Atlantic night in
1941 when Tirpitz is intercepted by a pair of New Mexico-class
battleships.

You know, those New Mexico and California class battlewagons
could dish out a world of hurt with twelve fourteen inchers.

Laura says:
May 29, 2009 at 7:51 pm

I concur. This is the bleakest bleat that was ever bleated. Loved this
on many levels, not the least of which that it is nice to see another
human being document their icon and cord management
compulsions.

Ed Singel says:
May 29, 2009 at 8:31 pm

Joe: TurboCad Mac Pro, Excel, and Mathematica, all for Mac. I’m too
old to have made the cut to be a gamer: I was in my 20s when Pong
came out. Besides, my employer had plenty of computers for work
stuff (retired now).

It's true that engineers like to tinker, and I do my share, but
occasionally we have to stop tinkering and actually do something!
HunkyBob says:
May 29, 2009 at 9:52 pm

Here's my entry for ReTweet theatre, such as it is.
http://www.xtranormal.com/watch?e=20090529224203923

HT says:
May 29, 2009 at 9:56 pm

MikeyNTH: except that the Tirpitz probably had greater range (15" vs. 14"), and could control the distance with her superior speed. Ha ha, out-geeked you. (snort, snerk).

John M. Hanna says:
May 29, 2009 at 10:08 pm

As far as I am concerned, the Coyote was the star of those cartoons. He averaged more screen time, he actually had speaking lines on occasion, he had more expressions and was more nuanced in characterization and he even appeared in more cartoons than the roadrunner. It should have been called “The Bugs Bunny/Wile E. Coyote Show”.

Baby M says:
May 30, 2009 at 8:26 am

MikeyNTH: one of the South Dakotas-Alabama, IIRC–actually did patrols and convoy duty in the North Sea in 1942. Try Alabama, a Brooklyn or two, and some prewar destroyers on one side against Tirpitz, Prinz Eugen, maybe a “pocket battleship” (heavy cruiser with delusions of grandeur) and some Narviks. Makes for a lively fight.

HT: Range isn’t that much of a factor in the North Sea because of the weather, and the Yankees have better fire control, even before radar. The Mk. 1 Fire Control Computer was the greatest non-digital computing machine ever built.

IrritableBear says:
May 30, 2009 at 9:01 am

Irritable Bear has an ad idea.

“Hello, I’m a Mac.”

“And I’m a PC.”

“And I’m Irritable Bear”.

HT says:
May 30, 2009 at 9:47 am

BabyM: your geek-fu is strong. The only way to settle this would be to fight out the scenario, using Fletcher-Pratt rules (or the modified version I still have in my possession). Understand, I’m not a particular fan of the Germans, but I’d take a ship with a 9-knot speed advantage and 9,000 yards of additional effective range and the German armor system over a pair of WWI vintage American battlewagons.

Tragically, the fact that we’re probably in different states will make that contest a bit difficult to arrange. So the world will never know
which of us was actually right.

**boblipton** says:
May 30, 2009 at 9:59 am

I looked at a Mac when the brand first came out. Back then Apple would let you have one for a few days to 'test drive' it. I found it to be excruciatingly slow, and when I mentioned this to some computer geek friends, was told “You don’t know what you're talking about.” While I knew — and still know — very little about computers, I did know fast from slow, so I shrugged and went back to PCs, which were faster and cheaper.

About three years, ago, however, my computer, a Dell, blew up and I watched a computer geek friend of mine spend sixteen hours on the phone with tech support trying to get it working. Eventually it became clear that the problem lay in the fact that the computer manufacturer was not in synch with the software manufacturer. At that point I blew up and decided that if there were going to be hardware-software disputes, let them be internal ones and switched to Macintoshes — and haven’t had a problem since.

Besides, Apple makes cool-looking machines.

**Jessajune** says:
June 2, 2009 at 11:41 am

I'm late to the comment party, but this is EXACTLY why I have 2 machines – Windows for games, Mac for the rest of my life. It has worked out very nicely.
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?