Cool weekend, but we've come to terms with that. We're like actors performing a bad play in an empty theater; we booked the hall for four more weeks, so we'll go through with it, day after day, droning the same lines. There's an absurd hope Fall will be warm, as thought it'll come along, discover Summer in the gutter, kick it in the ribs and say “let me show you how it's done.” This is like putting your faith in the Red Army after the Nazis have fled.

Sunday ended with a sudden storm – rolled out of the west, held off, announced its intentions with silent lightning, then pounced: angry rain, pounding like fists on a table. Fifteen minutes of drama and it was done. Now it's quiet outside, chastened. Some storms refresh the world; others make it wonder what the hell it did to deserve that.

I didn't do much this weekend, but I enjoyed myself, and I'm selfish enough to think that counts. Watched movies, of course, a few of which will be detailed later on this site. For some reason decided to watch “Marooned” last night, and was surprised how well it held up. It helps that it has David Janssen as the tough-as-nails senior astronaut, Gene Hackman as the sweaty scared astronaut, Gregory Peck as Ed Harris in “Apollo 13,” and other sundry pleasures. It came out the year before Apollo 13 happened, so it was rather prescient. Peck gives a pro-space-exploration speech that's stirring – it helps that he's dressing down a Deeply Concerned Journalist who's trying to get a gotcha about the risks of space exploration – but it's also quite sad, like
listening to Ike's address for a D-Day invasion that never happened.

There's something else that stuck out: it's a big movie. Superextra widescreen. It makes America look huge and powerful and capable, even if it's just a shot of a rocket on the pad. (Hah: even just.) The control room isn't that big, but it looks real – unlike, say, the vast high-tech caves in which government agencies have been operating in since “WarGames.” It gives you a sense of place without even trying, because that was the vernacular of the movies. I don't get a sense of place anymore. I get a sense of Vancouver, maybe. Or chilly modern soulless European cities. The world of the movies is frequently placeless and unmoored from the lives we lead. All the world's a stage, literally.

**About the Friday thread:** Oy! And thanks. I should admit my first media crushes, in the interests of full disclosure. I second the choice of Lisa Geritsen, which seems so unlikely – little kid with braces. But she seemed a peer, both in “My World and Welcome To It,” and later the Mary Tyler Moore show. Such are the escalations of adolescence that Mary Tyler Moore herself soon became an object of hamina-hamina, but in an abstract sense. There was always a chill about Mary Richards that Laura Petrie never had.

I also second the Petticoat Junction “gals” – as noted in the comments, the idea of them swimmin’ all . . . Petticoat free in that there water tank did things to a young feller. But these are obvious choices. I may have to go with the Romulan Commander – but not, necessarily, in that role. She appeared in a Hawaii 5-0 episode (something tells me it was a two-parter) and made a deep enough impression that I developed a hopeless crush on a girl at camp who resembled her. No, not the ears. The hair.

Of course, she didn't know I existed, me being a glasses-wearing short chubby dork, so I concocted a means to make her aware of my presence. Friday night there was a dance at the tennis court. A strange thing, this; no one was old enough to really be interested in the opposite sex, aside from secret furtive crushes, and everyone just stood along the sidelines and milled around drinking suicides (that would be every possible flavor from the canteen pop machine in one cup) waiting for something to happen. I decided to use a tube of fake blood I'd brought to camp for grins. Smeared it on my face and hands and staggered out of the dark. The plan: she would see me, and . . . . Well, we’d figure that part out later. What counted was she would see me. Either she would be overwhelmed with concern, or amused by my jape. Hey, this could go either way.

The first person I encountered was one of the pastors, a dead ringer for Donald Pleasance. “My son!” he said. “What happened?” I had to explain very quickly it was just fake stuff, and by then Dean, the hip bearded counselor all the girls just loved, appeared, figured it out, and relieved me of my tube of fake blood.

Her name was Joanne Linville, and she was in a Hawaii 5-0 two-parter. She was McGarrett's nemesis, but they had sparks. He put her away anyway. Said
“Book ‘er, Dan-o” with a catch in his throat.

Odd to think she’s 81 this year. Wonder where the girl went.

Later today: the Matchbook, of course, and blogging throughout the day – starting right now – at the Strib blog. See you around.

42 RESPONSES TO *monday, august 3*

**hpoulter** says:
August 3, 2009 at 5:27 am

The weird thing about “Marooned” is that it got dumped into the public domain film graveyard. Why? It was re-packaged and re-titled by Film Ventures (the guys who tacked on the cheesy blurry slow-mo intros, often unrelated to the actual film) and ended up being the subject of MST3K #401. You can watch the whole MST3K version on Google video. Mary Jo Pehl said the edited version of the film moves “slower than a Grandma at the mall”.

**Max Jenkins** says:
August 3, 2009 at 6:00 am

Joanne Linville – the “I Spy” episode she appeared in was pretty remarkable for the hubba hubba factor. 81 – you had to say it.

**GardenStater** says:
August 3, 2009 at 6:03 am

I saw “Marooned” when it first came out, so many years ago. I still have some vague memories of it (I knew David Janssen was in it, and Peck, but forgot about Hackman, probably because he wasn’t a big star then). It was a good flick, but I was 11. So maybe I’ll watch it again.

**hpoulter** says:
August 3, 2009 at 6:31 am

One thing the Friday thread showed was the broad age spread of Lileks regulars. Quite a few of us are older than our host (I noted at least three Hayley Mills crushes, which ment we were romantically inclined in 1961); many others are much younger.

**suze** says:
August 3, 2009 at 6:54 am

Here is a weird web site – it is an original Star Trek set with wax figures of the crew – and all the “babes” of Star Trek are named and posing with the figures – Joanne Linville is one of them.

http://www.enterprisewax.com/htmlpages/stars/babes.html
WatchWayne says:
August 3, 2009 at 7:15 am

Finally, a movie that I have seen, and remember quite well, though it has been 30 years or more since I saw it! I remember only (some of) the story— I wonder if I’d notice the grandiosity if I saw it again… I may not be enough of an epicure to notice those things under any circumstances.

ArganikMark says:
August 3, 2009 at 8:11 am

I hadn't thought of suicides (the mix of all pops drink) since probably, 1977. It was the equivalent of the Long Island Iced Tea to the “innocent young golfer” set.

Grebmar says:
August 3, 2009 at 8:24 am

I watched Marooned whenever it came on TV. It since drifted off to obscurity—glad to here its now online. I don't remember much except the big rocket launch in the eye of the hurricane, because that was the only time they could do the rescue.

Old Dad says:
August 3, 2009 at 8:27 am

Re: “Marooned” and Mission Control

James, if you haven't been to the Johnson Space Center, please take the Missus and Natalie asap. Three quick observations. The Saturn booster is huge—our old black and white 19″ TV could not possibly capture its majesty. Mission Control was actually quite small, and the Mercury capsules were miniscule. If you are even vaguely claustrophobic, John Glenn's capsule with leave you gasping.

Rand Simberg says:
August 3, 2009 at 8:32 am

Honey West, aka Anne Francis, lasted me until Diana Rigg came along as Emma Peel.

Cory says:
August 3, 2009 at 8:40 am

David McCallum – pre-Ilya in two superb roles:
In the great British Titanic movie A Night To Remember, one of the Titanic's radio operators.
In The Great Escape, the prisoner who comes up with the idea to hide the tunnel dirt in the garden. Character based on the real-life Alex Lees, who died recently.

juanito - John Davey says:
August 3, 2009 at 9:09 am


To this day I still desire the seemingly unattainable – A Soda Fountain in the house… Such lament…
Bonnie says:
August 3, 2009 at 9:24 am

I still feel sad when I read about another Shuttle launch, or an update on the International Space Station. I grew up on Heinlein and Asimov, Niven, Norton, Pournelle. By this time we American pioneers should have been terraforming Mars, sending out rockets to Jupiter's moons, and tinkering with faster-than-light propulsion systems.

Well, there's still time. Mars will still be there when we get our act together again.

Joe Sixpack says:
August 3, 2009 at 9:33 am

Your font still suX0rs.

For someone who professes to have great font taste, you sure make your website hard to read.

hpoulter says:
August 3, 2009 at 9:40 am

As Instapundit would say: “Where's my flying car?”

It's funny, though – we have a lot they didn't envision. I just read a Gregory Benford book from 1972 in which the protagonist lived in the 2030's and had a “reader slate”. All he had to do was pop in a “ferrite crystal” and the crystal contained an entire book! Of course, I was reading this in 2009 on my Sony PRS-505, which currently holds 450 e-books, and has room for thousands (it uses supplemental SD card storage). Cheap digital storage and networked computers really kinda beat flying cars any day. And as Bonnie said, Mars will be there for a while.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 3, 2009 at 9:52 am

Too lazy to look it up but, wasn’t “Marooned” written by the same guy who wrote “Cyborg” which was was turned into the “Six Million Dollar Man”? A NASA engineer or pilot, I believe I read both books.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 3, 2009 at 10:08 am

OK, I looked it up and he is and he wrote and did a lot of aviation stuff.

Martin Caidin

Mark E. Hurling says:
August 3, 2009 at 10:10 am

Perhaps I’m having some mind meld or cosmic convergence of NORAD movies, but I seem to recall that “Failsafe” had one of those high ceilinged auditoriums to display the northern Mercator projection of B52's headed to the old CCCP. Maybe Dr. Strangelove too.
bgbear (roger h) says:
August 3, 2009 at 10:14 am

Don't forget the Star Trek connection, Mariette Hartley as Hackman's wife. She was also Spock's frozen lover and possible mother of his kid. Surprised she did not make Friday's thread (or did she, someone may have said something about the James Garner commercials).

Also, Richard Crenna is an OTR bit of trivia, he was Marjorie's husband in The Great Gildersleeve.

Lars Walker says:
August 3, 2009 at 10:14 am

“There was always a chill about Mary Richards that Laura Petrie never had.”

Indeed. Mary Richards was charming and lovely and fun, but despite all her lamenting, she didn't really want a man in her life. It would have made her too uncool by '70s standards.

Harold Combs says:
August 3, 2009 at 10:16 am

I was given a V.I.P. studio tour with my Grandfather, a big time distributor, when Marooned was being shot. We got to watch the capsule hang in front of a bluescreen with an empty spacesuit in front of it while they tried to get the lighting right. A great treat for an 14 yr old.

John says:
August 3, 2009 at 10:50 am

Don't think I've ever been to a “chilly modern soulless European” city – in fact, they've all looked just the opposite. But I get the point: nothing ever gets launched in those places. And you know nothing ever will. Taxes are high in Europe, but you know that if they were lowered, there would be no answering spate of energetic enterprise: no sudden glut of Italian spacecraft, Norwegian cancer cures, German romantic comedies, or Portuguese gadgetry. (Does not the very phrase “Portuguese gadgetry” make you smirk?) No – a movie that looks like Europe can't deliver any more than Europe itself delivers, which is next to nil.

Richard says:
August 3, 2009 at 11:21 am

I'd like to go on record in full appreciation of this cool summer we're having in the midwest. I hate heat and humidity, and I'm saving money (and the planet) on A/C and lawn watering this year.

On the celebrity crush thing, well, if our host has opened this up to one-off appearances in TOS, you really can't beat Sherry Jackson as Andrea in “What are Little Girls Made of?” The story goes that she showed up in costume to the NBC commissary during a lunch break, and every single fork was suspended in air she walked past.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 3, 2009 at 11:25 am
@Richard

**Richard:**

...you really can't beat Sherry Jackson as Andrea in “What are Little Girls Made of?” The story goes that she showed up in costume to the NBC commissary during a lunch break, and every single fork was suspended in air she walked past.

Oh yes, the lower (under?)-cleavage costume. :p

ArganikMark says:
August 3, 2009 at 11:27 am

“Portuguese gadgetry” does make me smirk. And besides pungent wines, what does Portugal export? It seems to be the only European country to not produce even a middling professional golfer. And why the same with Brazil? Coincidence?

Chris M says:
August 3, 2009 at 11:40 am

I gotta say I love this weather. 70°F is just perfect for me. I can’t imagine spending the weekend inside watching movies. Yesterday was nice and breezy, and I spent 3 hours sailing my boat up and down the lake. My wife thinks we should retire somewhere like Arizona, but upper Michigan sounds better to me. Luckily I still have 30 more years to convince her.

ArganikMark says:
August 3, 2009 at 12:14 pm

**Chris M:** My wife thinks we should retire somewhere like Arizona, but upper Michigan sounds better to me.

Go with your upper Michigan thoughts. Even when it does get hot it doesn’t last and it’s usually not too humid. In Grand Rapids we just had our coolest avg. July on record and although they’re calling for upper 80s maybe even ninety by next weekend, we have cool breezy nights. (Plus lakes galore). When the sh@t hits the fan, water will be the next oil and 20% of the worlds fresh water is in the Great Lakes basin. I put up with Winter because of the rest of the year.

Bob says:
August 3, 2009 at 12:54 pm

“Marooned” will always have special significance to me because there’s a good chance it was the first movie I ever saw in a theater. I have no recollection of the occasion except that I was haunted for decades by the image of an astronaut drifting away from the camera, his suit integrity breached; even at four years old I understood that he was doomed.

This memory was so powerful that for thirty years I was vaguely afraid to see the movie again. But I finally faced my fears and rented it back in the ‘90s, and I was surprised to find it much better than I thought it would be.
HelloBall says:
August 3, 2009 at 1:07 pm

Richard: ... The story goes that she showed up in costume to the NBC commissary during a lunch break, and every single fork was suspended in air she walked past.

[Nudge nudge, wink wink] I'll just bet every single fork was suspended in air. Say no more!

Wramblin' Wreck says:
August 3, 2009 at 1:24 pm

ArganikMark:
“Portuguese gadgetry” does make me smirk. And besides pungent wines, what does Portugal export? It seems to be the only European country to not produce even a middling professional golfer. And why the same with Brazil? Coincidence?

Portugal and Brazil limit their exports to models. The perfect product for a pulchritudinous old-fart geezer like me.

Who cares about golfers or gadgetry. Just bring on the eye candy. That's enough for me. LOL.

ArganikMark says:
August 3, 2009 at 1:30 pm

Wramblin' Wreck, I'm just guessing that the adjective pulchritudinous does not apply to you. Perhaps pulchritudiphilic. Just saying. And in this forum you could very well be right about golfers, but I'll bet you'd get an argument concerning gadgetry.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
August 3, 2009 at 2:20 pm

ArganikMark:
Wramblin' Wreck, I'm just guessing that the adjective pulchritudinous does not apply to you. Perhaps pulchritudiphilic. Just saying. And in this forum you could very well be right about golfers, but I'll bet you'd get an argument concerning gadgetry.

LOL. You are absolutely correct. Once again exposed as the fool I am. I need to find that brown paper bag, put it over my head and go sit in the corner some more.

Wreck's Law (a subset of the Peter Principle) states ‘To advance in the corporate hierarchy you must demonstrate your incompetence.’ Therefore I should probably be at least a VP if not the CEO based on my demonstrated incompetent postings. It is good to learn something new (or to correct something) every day.
Irritable Bear says:
August 3, 2009 at 2:26 pm

And to do something in the woods every day.

Lou Shumaker says:
August 3, 2009 at 2:51 pm

I, too, saw “Marooned” way back when, in the theatre (I also saw “Capricorn One” with OJ Simpson).

Later, when MST3K ran “Stranded in Space,” it took me a good 15 minutes for the penny to drop. It’s probably the Top-Cast movie they’ve ever done, and it was an interesting experiment in seeing how satire can take the wind out of a movie. Sort of like those movie trailers recut into a different genre. Stories are so incredibly flexible.

Dave says:
August 3, 2009 at 6:05 pm

“Odd to think she’s 81 this year. Wonder where the girl went.”

Three years ago, she went to Las Vegas for a virgin, I mean Star Trek, convention:
http://www.startrek.com/startrek/mediaview?id=23196

wimseyguy says:
August 3, 2009 at 7:39 pm

Suze, thanks for the Star Trek wax museum link. All the ladies look like they have a great sense of humor. But I think they better turn the air conditioning back on. The crew of the Enterprise is looking pretty rugged.

Rim Sanberg, you and I had the exact same crush pattern. Who came next for you? After they canceled the Avengers I took comfort in Katherine Ross with the occasional Erin Gray in the Scatterperm commercials. Thanks James for refreshing that particular memory. Girlfriends (and the associated difficulties) happened soon thereafter.

Grebmar says:
August 3, 2009 at 9:10 pm

I am a bit slow on the celebrity crush thing. I don’t really remember any crushes from the 70s, even though I was old enough then. I was just too dorky. What I finally realized that it was probably Felicity Kendall from Good Neighbors (Richard Briers wife), when that show was on KTCA many moons ago…

NeeNee says:
August 3, 2009 at 10:05 pm

Ah, suicides.

Squirt of Coke, squirt of Dr. Pepper, squirt of rootbeer, squirt of orange soda, squirt of 7-Up as I recall. Somehow it had a very faint Clorox aftertaste . . . .
Bill says:
August 4, 2009 at 1:07 am

I guess I have to be the one to bring up that Bess was played by Lisa Gerritsen – two “r”s.

There is, of course, a Wikipedia entry:


RaccoonPrincess says:
August 4, 2009 at 10:42 am

I'm a girl, so maybe that's why I don't see the appeal of the Romulan commander lady, but she always sounded to me as though she was sucking on helium and that costume did nothing for her figure. That voice really bothered me. I always wondered why the crew hadn't offed her because of it.

Chas C-Q says:
August 4, 2009 at 4:27 pm

@ArganikMark

Brazil has turned out more than its share of Formula One drivers, the legendary:

Rubens Barrichello
Emerson Fittipaldi
Ingo Hoffmann
Felipe Massa
Nelson Piquet
Nelson Piquet Jr.
Antônio Pizzonia
Ayrton Senna

and others:

Enrique Bernoldi
Raul Boesel
Luciano Burti
Cristiano da Matta
Pedro Diniz
Christian Fittipaldi
Wilson Fittipaldi
Tarso Marques
Roberto Moreno
José Carlos Pace
Chico Serra
Ricardo Zonta

Chas C-Q says:
August 4, 2009 at 7:40 pm

Hasty C&P SB:

Rubens Barrichello
Emerson Fittipaldi
Felipe Massa
Nelson Piquet
Ayrton Senna

Enrique Bernoldi
Raul Boesel
Sitting outside in a different chair. Not the usual writing chair. It's wet. I've been watering the lawn this evening; I have two chika-chika sprinklers connected to a single hose, and between the two of them they get about 70 percent of the yard. Which means I have to set them up again for the other 30 percent, adjust the pattern and the distance. You really don't know how it's going to work until you turn on the water; you make adjustments, and go about your business. But sometimes it's easy to mistake the settings, so they're the exact opposite of where you think they are. So it was: I turned on the water, and saw Sprinkler #1 shoot a big fat gout of water into the gazebo. Time slowed. I knew there was no way to turn off the water before it hit the laptop.

Or the book.

Ah, but if I turn off the water now, I can make it to the laptop before the sprinkler comes 'round again. Or not? Should I not bolt for the laptop and cut off the water later? I don't remember what I did; I just remember standing outside my body, seeing my horrified expression as the water hit the laptop. But it was closed.

Because, you see, I'm smart. Knowing the water might hit the gazebo, I'd closed the laptop.

As opposed to just moving it.
Idiot.

Well, it's fine. The book's shiny cover was easily wiped, and the pages didn't get drenchenated, so we're all good on all counts, except for the chair. I have a new view, and frankly I don't know why I don't sit here all the time. I can see the Oak Island Water Feature, the water flowing down the stones. Soon the lights will click on, illuminating the cascade from below. Perfect summer night.

**Perfect** summer day, too. Good news: the movie in which your host had a starring role, if you define “starring” as “one of the last persons seen in film, and only then if you're on some sort of cinematic scavenger hunt that includes noticing overhead shots of someone sitting in a church pew with his bald spot on display, has been picked up for distribution. I discussed this last summer when it was shot, and earlier this year when it was premiered. A friend wrote & directed it; his wife produced; since we have kids in the same circle, Natalie was enlisted for a First Communion scene. Russell Hosapple, the fellow whose symphony premiered at Minnesota Youth Symphony years ago – another ancient Bleat buried in the archives – did the score. As the imdb page notes, it has some fine, fine talent, including Kevin from “The Office.” To complete the circle: I'll be blurbed on the posters and DVD box. Hah! First time. And this should be a new expression of surprise: *Well, I'll be blurbed.*

Just remembered something I have been meaning to blurb, but haven’t. Crap. Well. It's been that sort of summer, and I'm hoping to dig out in the next two weeks. You cannot imagine what my studio looks like now – the end of the great final scanning project is underway, with boxes and boxes and reams and reams fed to the whining machinery. Six years of reader contributions, finally digitized.

By some odd coincidence it coincides with my wife's command to DO SOMETHING about the boxes heaped in the storage room.

I will meet October with a great weight off my chest. I will meet December with the novel mostly done. In between now and then I just want to be happy and content and useful. The last two weeks have been a bit unfortunate, with the Black Dog prowling and growling in the bushes outside the reach of the campfire light; I just lost enthusiasm for my enthusiasms. I think it's lifted. The worst thing about Depression isn't the sense that you're ac-centuating the negative, it's that you're seeing things the way they really are, stripped of the illusions you use every day to divert yourself from the Yawning Maw of Futility. It's the wind that blows off the snow and reveals the stone.

**This is an appalling story:** British authorities, to use two words that nowadays seem to suggest power unmoored from reason and abetted by weary, deafeated indifference, will install cameras in the homes of bad parents:

*The Children's Secretary set out £400million plans to put 20,000 problem Child 44 Tom Rob Smith Best Price $0.02 or Buy New Privacy Information*
families under 24-hour CCTV super-vision in their own homes.

They will be monitored to ensure that children attend school, go to bed on time and eat proper meals.

Well. I’m sure there’s more to this than the article suggests, but the one thing missing, as far as I can tell, is any discussion whatsoever of the legal basis for this. I mean, it can’t be mandatory. They’re not that far gone. It wouldn’t surprise you if they are mandatory, but even if they are, I can see some of the people making a lark of it: it’s just like being on Big Brother. I suppose the way to get the real Big Brother is to train people to volunteer for it on television; makes it easier to sell them the home-game version, as they used to call it.

Also from the article:

Mr Balls also said responsible parents who make sure their children behave in school will get new rights to complain about those who allow their children to disrupt lessons.

There’s a bonanza crop of official dysfunction in that sentence. First of all: parents will get new rights to complain. This suggests that the previous rights were constrained somehow; this suggests that the state grants, in its theoretically infinite benevolence, the right to complain in the first place. Or rather the state admits that it has some responsibility to follow up on the complaints not dealt with the last time rights were kindly granted.. What new rights? Were people previously enjoined from making the case that a disruptive student should be disciplined or expelled, because it violated the rights of the child? “New rights to complain,” you suspect, means little more than a new set of procedures, each with their own benchmarks and standards and timetables.

Of course, the problem is school itself, since it’s full of shrieking headmasters badgering sensitive children with the great unanswered question of British education: how can you have any pudding if you haven’t eaten your meat? Remember one of the grievances put forth by Roger Waters in “Another Brick in the Wall” – *dark sarcasm in the classroom.*

Teacher! Leave those kids alone!

Seems they got their wish.

**Later today:** Comic Sins, of course; B&W World Summer Sci-Fi Drive-in Edition. And the new blog here and there. Do visit – it’s not local like buzz.mn, not entirely. It’s what I would do here if I was paid to write this all day. Strib blog with Post Office story right now. See you soon.
44 RESPONSES TO tuesday, august 04

Ed Driscoll » 1984: A User Manual For The Left, A Warning For The Rest Of Us says:
August 4, 2009 at 3:33 am

[...] And speaking of video, in Airstrip One, the installation of two-way telescreens proceeds apace. [...] 

hpoulter says:
August 4, 2009 at 4:59 am

Hmm – a busted link to the Blog O’ Things.
Should be
http://www.startribune.com/blogs/lileks.html
not
http://www.startribune.com/blogs/lileks/html
Kind of like all those busted links in the Diner Archives.

Ron Moses says:
August 4, 2009 at 5:49 am

Heh heh... Mr. Balls.

Z says:
August 4, 2009 at 6:23 am

Your summing up of “British authorities” hits it right on the button. My only consolation is that I’ve never voted for this appalling government.

hpoulter says:
August 4, 2009 at 6:52 am

I think it’s ungood that only a few homes are getting the Telescreen. How can the rest properly praise Big Brother?

I wonder how many people in this country have a problem with the idea of government “giving rights” to citizens? How many realize just how poisonous a notion that is?

Nancy says:
August 4, 2009 at 7:19 am

“giving rights” to citizens? How many realize just how poisonous a notion that is?”

dittos

WatchWayne says:
August 4, 2009 at 7:26 am

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=3334
My guess is that the families voluntarily submitted to the cameras as an alternative to what was probably the LEGAL remedy– throwing the parents in jail for being losers, or taking the kids away from them. I’ve heard of a few cases similar in our own country– kid wears a sandwich board proclaiming that he’s a thief, DUI, or whatever, instead of 30 days in the hole.

I always like it when I leave the Bleat with a boost to my vocabulation. My family doesn’t appreciate my own attempts at expanding the lexicon by adding words that should rightfully already exist, but tough.

One last thing– this is the second “news” instance I have read lately of someone in the UK named Balls. Must not be that uncommon over there, and probably doesn’t have the same, sneering connotation. Now, if he had been named Mr. Bollocks…

Joe the Painter says:
August 4, 2009 at 7:51 am

Wow…Simply…wow. But after the last 6-12 months of hopiness and change, I’m not surprised. I think the desensitization waves coming from the TV for the last 30 years are having their effect…

This has been a spooky, spooky year. It even gave me a brain tumor (no really, I’m having it removed on Monday, granted that the Controlling Legal Authority allows it).

I quit telling myself that it will get better about a year ago. All I have to absolutely believe in is how well I raise MY kids…

raf says:
August 4, 2009 at 7:57 am

JtP, good luck, etc. I know someone who had a good-sized brain tumor removed more than fifteen years ago & he is still going strong.

Jan says:
August 4, 2009 at 7:58 am

Boy, there’s a whole semester’s worth of discussion fodder in that story, not the least of which is the distinction between constitutions that grant rights and those that guarantee rights. Sorry if this reminds any of you that the new school year looms.

WatchWayne says:
August 4, 2009 at 8:09 am

Joe the Painter: After they sell off all your STUFF, about the only thing left really is how well you raised your kids. I hope the sale is a LONG, Long time from now, O’care not withstanding.

Jen says:
August 4, 2009 at 8:23 am

From the article: “This is pretty tough and non-negotiable support for families to get to the root of the problem.”

Because government solves everything! They’ll get to the root of the problem and solve it for you, you worthless, flawed human-type!
I understand offering drug and alcohol counseling, but seriously — surveillance? Being babysat by private security guards? Scary.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
August 4, 2009 at 8:23 am

*Of course, the problem is school itself, since it's full of shrieking headmasters badgering sensitive children with the great unanswered question of British education:*

The real question of British Education being; how do you handle dead rodents without subjecting yourself to balloon hands and a fevered, psychedelic dream?

Bonus exit question: Manscaping – hard core, copious bloodletting style as depicted by Sir Bob Geldof in the film, or with the new swishy fancy-boy appliances available to modern day swells?

My answer – I just don’t need to know.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
August 4, 2009 at 8:26 am

Oh the linkie to the Blog O' Things is fubarred should be —
http://www.startribune.com/blogs/lileks.html

But then, I've *never* made a typing error. Ever. In my life…

**Terry Fitz** says:
August 4, 2009 at 8:35 am

Don’t flirt with Depression. Don’t look for meaning in your hobbies first. All the meaning you need is in how you take care of your family & friends. Once you have that straight, you just may be able to see the meaning in your documentary avocations and in things like the Bleat, which bring cheer to many thousands of people daily. So count your blessings. Seriously. Do this as a nightly exercise whenever the Black Dog growls. Then cowboy up and remember that the only sin God has a hard time forgiving is ingratitude.

There’s a whole world of new enthusiasms to embrace if the ones you’ve had for years begin to pall. And remember that although your readers will never physically share a scotch and a small cigar in your gazebo, we do care, and we don’t like to see that you’ve been musing about futility. Tails up, man, and scan that next box!

**Defrost Indoors** says:
August 4, 2009 at 8:44 am

Despite the myth of polite, inhibited Britain, it seems like they’ve really been trying to cope with a growing chav culture; witness the creation of the ASBO order (yes, I know, that’s like “ATM machine”); teachers are regularly assaulted by students, and public drunkenness is a growing problem. I blame the overly generous dole system; it sometimes seems, at least according to my friends Over There, that signing on for benefits is more or less seen as a legitimate career choice. Remember this is coming from a Canadian, so I’m already a bleeding socialist. 😊 And yes, “Balls” does mean the same there as here.
MikeH says:
August 4, 2009 at 9:01 am

Not surprised about the CCTV in the homes in Britain. Seems like the whole country is under closed circuit, mainly outdoors for “crime prevention” and ID suspects. It is really scary sounding.

Defrost Indoors says:
August 4, 2009 at 9:03 am

…weird, where’d my comment go?!

Defrost Indoors says:
August 4, 2009 at 9:05 am

…Anyway, what I was trying to say was that Britain seems to be trying to cope with chav culture, and despite the myth of quiet, inhibited Brits they're having a really hard time curbing antisocial behaviour. I would partially blame the breathtaking ease of getting the dole; it seems to me that signing up for benefits is more or less seen as a legit career choice these days. This is coming from a Canadian, btw, so I’m already pretty comfortable with ‘socialism’ 😏 but even I think it’s appalling at how easy it is to wring money out of the system.

Harold Combs says:
August 4, 2009 at 9:20 am

My wife's purse was snatched on the high street in Nottingham a couple of years ago. When she found a PC and reported the theft, she pointed out that it was taken in full view of one of the “security” cameras and the police should have seen the crime. The PC said, in effect, “You think we have people & time to watch all those things?” Never did see any results. Love the UK but the government is going insane.

Lou Shumaker says:
August 4, 2009 at 9:49 am

This is on a part with the 22-year-old alcoholic who was denied a liver transplant and died recently (rather than provide a link and send the post into moderation, just google “Britain alcoholic denied liver transplant”).

This is where Obama wants us to go.

On the other hand, under that standard, David Crosby would have been denied one, and that would have taken care of any potential CS&N albums, so it would have had its good points as well.

swschrad says:
August 4, 2009 at 10:22 am

active drug abusers getting transplants? that does not compute. I may be a card-carrying, banner-waving capital-L Liberal, but folks, that does not compute. that's like a government bailout of Bernie Madoff or Tom Petters, Ponzi artists supreme.

some folks deserve a hand up.

some folks deserve to be slapped silly.
bgbear (roger h) says:
August 4, 2009 at 10:30 am

Serious-ish: Not much to add to what others have said. I have often commented to my wife that I think Britain is headed to revolution.

Funny-ish: The name “Balls” does make this sound like a parody. I remember a character in a Inspector Clouseau film with the name Balls and he ran a shop and there was a fire so they had a sale. The joke was some play on “The Great Balls Fire Sale.”

Pam-EL says:
August 4, 2009 at 10:33 am

swschrad: some folks deserve to be slapped silly.

And I would like to be the one to do it. It would be great therapy all around.

Blar says:
August 4, 2009 at 10:43 am

@swschrad: The argument is not that alcoholics do or don’t deserve liver transplants, but that it is a sign of creeping totalitarianism for a national government to even be making that determination.

Also, not to put any further pressure on the already kaleidoscopically-refracted output of Our Good Host, but isn’t this last point of the post Screedblog material?

Becky says:
August 4, 2009 at 10:59 am

I was gonna be an extra in that movie, too… in the coffee shop scene – but they filmed it at 3am instead of the afternoon! 😁

Nevertheless, I will rent it to catch a glimpse of yours truly! 😁

jeischen says:
August 4, 2009 at 11:40 am

What if…all those reality shows — The Real World, Big Brother, Last Survivor, Kate & Jon, etc. — were really a secret government plot to slowly get the sheeple accustomed to 24-hour government surveillance? Scary, dude!

My favorite transplant story was the time my wife and I went to a local dinner fundraiser. The place was crowded and we were seated at a table with a couple we had not met before. The husband went on and on about his recent heart/lung transplant. I remarked that he looked rather well. He thanked me, then pushed back from the table and fired up an after-dinner cigarette.

Stephaniej says:
August 4, 2009 at 11:53 am

Oh James. Always save the Laptop… after losing 2 electrical conveniences, 1 laptop and 1 cell phone, to water in a month. I say always save the laptop. It's better than
forking over the money for a new one.

_EmGee_ says:
August 4, 2009 at 12:43 pm

How about the patient who died here in the good ol’ USA last week who was denied a liver transplant by Cigna because his cancer had gone out of remission? What's the difference between possibly dying of cancer or possibly dying of an alcohol related condition? Is Cigna a socialist program or a corporate for profit insurance company? Confused? You should be. At least the English lad hadn’t been paying premiums all his life before his healthcare provider pulled his plug.

David Crosby got a transplant not because he had insurance but because he could afford to pay for the surgery (or pay for insurance that would cover it – very few of us have that type of coverage), could afford get on all the lists and fly anywhere, anytime, as soon as one was available. If that alcoholic in England were that rich, he'd have gotten his liver too, because they do have private healthcare there, and it is probably cheaper because it isn't subsidizing all the malfeasance running rampant in our system.

_Kevin_ says:
August 4, 2009 at 12:51 pm

I read a different story, and it implied that the 20K homes were all council flats, aka “the projects” as we know them here.

_Kelly H_ says:
August 4, 2009 at 1:01 pm

I believe the US is the only country where the citizens have inalienable rights. The rights are not granted by the government as are those of our friends in the UK so greatly enjoy.

_Writeaway_ says:
August 4, 2009 at 1:22 pm

“Don't flirt with Depression.” Well meant, but when the black dog comes, there's no flirting at all. You just turn around or wake up and there he is on your chest, refusing to be ignored.

On a semi-lighter note, it's interesting that the Pink Floyd song is still relevant, maybe even more so today than when first recorded. And I think it's time to watch “Brazil” again. Nothing to do with British education, but everything to do with government meddling.

_D Palmer_ says:
August 4, 2009 at 1:29 pm

_Blar_ :@swschrad: The argument is not that alcoholics do or don't deserve liver transplants, but that it is a sign of creeping totalitarianism for a national government to even be making that determination.

Also, not to put any further pressure on the already kaleidoscopically-refracted output of Our Good Host, but isn't this last point of the post Screedblog material?

On the other hand, with a VERY limited supply of transplant organs
and a lengthy list of potential recipients, doesn’t it make sense to have a central agency that controls the process to (theoretically) ensure fairness? Everybody with non-self inflicted liver disease got their transplant? Great, now you can get yours.

CinqueMiller says:
August 4, 2009 at 2:04 pm

Why is everyone taking the Daily Express seriously on the matter of CCTV? Because its masthead says it’s the “World’s Greatest Newspaper”? Or because British tabloids’ reputation for straightforward, accurate reporting? Appalling if true, but if it had been reported by the National Enquirer, would we be so eager to believe it?

fizzbin says:
August 4, 2009 at 2:28 pm

Shortly before dirt was invented I took a Constitutional Law course. IIRC, under the English system all rights are exclusive to the Crown. If His Majesty, The Queen, grants his subjects rights, these are written into laws, rules and a double ‘elpin of regulations. So the statement that other parents could be granted rights for additional complaints is correct. Under our system, so far and in spite of the Obahmessiah, rights are exclusive to the people. Our rights can be limited by legislation only if the limits do not conflict with the supreme law of the U.S. – the Constitution.

All of that is a simple statement of a simple person. I could go on and on and on because it’s a really complicated subject about which we’ve been arguing for over 300 years. Let’s hope we keep arguing for another 3,000 years, Uff Da!!

Blar says:
August 4, 2009 at 3:04 pm

@D Palmer: I’m hardly an expert, but a quick bit of wiki-fu points me to the United Network for Organ Sharing seems to be the sort of central clearinghouse for organ donation you have in mind. It was established by Congress in 1984 but seems to be free of government control, unlike the NHS. Again, I’m not an expert, but the point is that you can manage organ transplants without giving draconian control to the government.

Joe Broderick says:
August 4, 2009 at 3:51 pm

This story regarding CCTV in private homes appeared in the Daily Express, which means it is probably bollocks.

steveH says:
August 4, 2009 at 4:03 pm

“So the statement that other parents could be granted rights for additional complaints is correct.”

Only for certain values of “correct”.

If the government can give it, they can take it away. If they grant it to you, you’ve received a privilege. (And they can be taken away, no matter what you might wish.)
Our Bill of Rights recognizes limits placed on the government's power to infringe its citizens' inherent rights. Those rights are protected, not granted.

Very different things.

EmGee says:
August 4, 2009 at 4:24 pm

Okay, so my first post didn't make the cut. Briefly, people with pre-existing conditions get turned down by private insurance companies for transplants over here too, see: Nataline Sarkisyan. To imply that they do not, and that it is strictly the provenance of socialized medicine is misleading. Unless you think an alcoholic's life is somehow more precious than a cancer survivor's.

Sonny Moon says:
August 4, 2009 at 7:49 pm

Here is the link to the U.K.'s Department for Children, Schools and Families. I searched through the list of 2009 news releases and could find nothing to corroborate the 'CCTV in private homes' story:

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/index.htm

Every hit on the story eventually leads back to one and only source, the Daily Express.

teach5 says:
August 4, 2009 at 8:33 pm

Sorry to hear that the past two weeks have been prudish for you JL. Glad you're back up on the horse. Do not despair—we are a faithful audience, in spite of any drooling black dog. We would indeed share a good cigar with you in the gazebo, but Jasper can be the only dog in attendance. Chip up!

D T Nelson says:
August 4, 2009 at 10:17 pm

What @KellyH and @steveH said. In the UK, the monarch holds all rights and deigns to dole some out to the people, and may take them back. In the US, the people hold all rights and have granted a few, enumerated rights to the government, through the Constitution.

Of course, ninety-five percent (an estimate — so sue me) of the what the federal government does are things it has not been given the right to do. I blame this state of affairs on the Seventeenth Amendment, which took away the sovereign states' representation in the federal government.

Ross says:
August 5, 2009 at 2:42 am

“What @KellyH and @steveH said. In the UK, the monarch holds all rights and deigns to dole some out to the people, and may take them back...”

Yes, that's a pretty little fiction to make the “We're Number One! We're Number One!” mouth-breathers feel better, but anyone who didn't sleep through all of their history classes knows that the Brits already had a civil war about that particular point—and the Crown
lost_. It's called a “constitutional monarchy” because the monarch, while the head of state (the ceremonial aspect of gov’t), may only suggest, not command. Nothing happens under British law w/o Parliament or the sitting gov’t (w/the PM as its head). Short of what's left of the British military dropping acid and mounting a coup to erase The Glorious Revolution, it's just as much a representative democracy as any other Western state.

Now, if you want to substitute “the gov’t” for “the monarch” in those statements, you’d be close to the mark.

QotD: Depression « Quotulatiousness says:
August 5, 2009 at 11:03 pm

[...] Lileks, Bleat, 2009-08-04 Comments [...]
‘Twas National Night Out, which I dumped on over at the Stribblog. Oh, it’s a nice incentive to get together, but when the second point in the National Night Out (TM) site’s FAQ lays down the rules for using the Official Logo, and the fourth point covers the need to buy your promotional material in a timely matter, well. But we went, and it was fun – I talked with the son of a neighbor, who’s back from school. Where do you go? Naval Academy. Oh! Well, thank you for that. What do you want to do? He said he wanted to fly, and I ribbed him a bit: isn’t there another branch that handles that, and it’s, like, Job One? These are the things we civilians don’t get: there are reasons for wanting to fly for the Navy, just like there’s reasons to want to captain ships for the Marines. Something for everyone.

He’d just spent two weeks on a sub. Most young people you meet at a block party aren’t fresh from a fortnight in the briny deep, so I was keen to learn more; asked which class of sub he was on. (Ohio.) I have limited knowledge of these things, but I know what a SLBM is, and the difference between a fast-attack and a hang-around-waiting-to-nuke-somone sub, so I asked questions until I had nothing left but “see any good sub movies? They’re all the same, but they’re still good in their own way.” I had the feeling he wasn’t entirely accustomed to civilians taking an interest in the particulars. Or all too accustomed to wannabees eager to be One of the Guys. Who knows. The only sub movie he’d seen was “Hunt for Red October.”

“Not even Das Boot,” his mother said, joining the conversation. “That’s what I
thought of when he said he was going on a sub.”

“Well, the chances he’ll run the straits of Gibraltar under Allied fire are low,” I reassured her.

She gave me a kind look: you’re not a mother. The world is the straits of Gibraltar.

Talked with other neighbors about that one house with the kids, and the problems; discovered that another neighbor has been working for one company his entire life: Burger King. Marketing. Oh, joy! So, what do the franchisees pay to the company to fund promotion? Four percent of sales, and about half goes to national campaigns, which includes the campaigns designed to thrive on the internet via word of mouth. So put yourself in the shoes of some guy who runs a Burger King in Minot, coming across the Sir Mix-A-Lot / Spongebob ad on YouTube, thinking: I’m paying for this. Man.

After a couple of hours we went home; daughter was tired and disengaged after a long day at Phy-Ed camp. “There’s nothing to DO here,” she said. I asked what her friend was doing. “She’s just petting a dog.” Under ordinary circumstances she would have been doing the same; I recalled previous Block Parties, where she would run to the end of the street, to the magic yellow tape that blocked off the road, and most of my conversations were interrupted by periodic interrogations of the perimeter, to make sure the Kidnapping Ninja Brigade had not deployed from stealth copters and stolen my child. I wondered if she was being bored because she wanted to go home and return to the imaginary-friend world of her collaborative internet iScribble storytelling sessions.

I don’t want to raise a kid who prefers the virtual to the real.

“I just don’t feel all too great,” she said.

This isn’t an act, so you can go home and get on the computer? If it’s an act I’m going to enroll you in theater camp so you can hone your skills. You want to get away with something, you’ll have to use an English accent. A convincing one with a specific dialect, not your generic posh pseudo-accent. Why, you’ll have to master Mancunian vowels, child, and -

“Dad! I just ate too much and I’m tired and they’re just petting the dog.”

Sometimes it’s just that.

All in all, a fine day – cool, of course. But busy. Now I’m taking a break from watching “Aliens,” which, as I said on Twitter (something I say just to admit I’m repeating myself) is the movie that makes Michael Bay know how Salieri felt whenever he heard Mozart. Leaving aside all movies that do not involve spaceships and giant acid-blooded xenomorphs, it may be the greatest film ever. I’m surprised how long it takes to get to the action – you don’t notice it for two reasons. One, the scenes on board the ship en route to the planet were just rockin’ good fun when the movie first came out; the idea of Marines in Space was uber-cool, and new. Nowadays they’d never spend that much
time on such a sequence; the filmmakers would assume we knew the basics, because we'd seen it in "Aliens."

Two: the movie begins with a sequence that confuses and unnerves. It seems as if we go right to the Aliens, and you don't know what's going on. When Ripley's ship is cut open by the salvage crew, the shape of the cutting tool makes you think an Alien is outside – what, they're running blow torches now? What? - and then you realize it's not. When the door falls open and the sensor probe enters the craft, it has the outline of an Alien, crouching. The movie tricks you, twice, right away, and what would be an ordinary sequence is almost heart-pounding.

The first time I saw the first Alien movie, I was so unnerved I had to turn on the lights a month later when an ad came on TV late at night. The first time I saw "Aliens," I thought it was the most comprehensively effective thing I'd ever seen. Perhaps you had to be there – if you're younger than I happen to be, you've seen "Aliens" repeated over and over again. But at the time? This was every movie we'd waited for.

Later: Out of Context Ad Challenge, around 10; Minneapolis in the afternoon; the Stribblog scattered throughout. See you soon!

51 RESPONSES TO Wednesday, August 05

Fred says:
August 11, 2009 at 8:39 am
Back to Submarines. If you ever want to see a look of disgust and scorn on the face of a submarine sailor mention the movie "Crimson Tide". If he's seen it he will either growl with anger at the sloppy, inaccurate details or he will laugh at how inexcusably they go it so wrong. I go back and forth between both emotions but most often settle on disgust and anger, probably because 'Hunt For Red October' got it so right...

← Older Comments
UNTOLD RICHES AWAITS YOU

This is just a fragment of the site, you know. Head HERE for the full menu. Enjoy!

BLEAT PREMIUM

Go HERE to join - for as little as you like. You’ll get an email with your passwords. The page for your bonus-secret ulta links is HERE!

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING?

Use the form below to search the site:

Still not finding what you’re looking for? Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!

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
Institute of Official Cheer
Lint: the Institute Tumblr
PopCrush
Screedblog
Shorpy.com
StarTribune Column

ARCHIVES

All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
May 2013
April 2013
March 2013
February 2013
January 2013
December 2012
November 2012
October 2012
September 2012
August 2012

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

© 2011 The Bleat.
developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Oh, dammit: research spoils EVERYTHING. I was all set to upload this to the Strib Blog under the title “Olivah, dahling,” with the summary “A few years ago, Arnold would have been approved for a no-doc loan,” and the body copy “Suddenly, the backstory of ‘Green Acres’ seems more complex than previously thought.” I wish I didn’t have to have a title, or a summary, but that’s another matter. Here’s the image I intended to post:
Except, of course, the character's name was EB. Not Zeb, but Eb. The idea that Eb may have been Mr. Haney's son would have added much to the show. Not that it needed it. “Green Acres” was one of the most peculiar, surreal shows that came from CBS’ cornpone period; it doesn't belong in the same world as the other rural-based shows. Almost every conversation was a masterpiece of circular logic.

**You don't always see** a page of pictures of a corporate CEO touring a new store on a Segway, *so here you go*. It's the new Penneys store in Manhattan. I don't keep up on New York culture as much as I used to, so if the locals are horrified, I don't know, or care. I remember how Target made some sniff with distaste, because a Big Box retailer was intruding on the quaint scale of Manhattan; I'm sure Penneys draws rolled eyes in the right crowds. It's so... *Anchorage*. Or Idaho. Whichever.

But the new store inhabits a space sanctified by its spiritual predecessors. The building used to be an A&S store, and I recall hearing the locals – meaning, people who'd lived in New York a WHOLE YEAR or so – complaining about the building' indoor mall. That was so *suburban*. You wonder if they had a Nathan's as some sort of sacrificial offering. *Look! They don't have these in Indianapolis! Nathan's! Okay?* Before it was a mall, it was Gimbels, that which does not tell Macy's, once the largest department store chain in the country. So it's a venerable mid-market retail location.

(By the way, Titanic fans: yes, *that* Strauss.)

As I'm sure some of the news articles note, Penneys used to have its corporate HQ in Manhattan, at 1301 6th avenue – in a perfect early 1960s building of great bulk and small charm. It's the usual fat-base-tall-tower model produced by the zoning laws. (New York has changed architectural styles twice, both times with zoning laws, both times in a quest for more air and space. The first led to the gorgeous set-backs of the 20s and 30s; the second time led to tall featureless towers standing alone in chilly, modern plazas.) When they left in the late 80s for Plano, Texas, it must have stung – but now it seems odd they were there in the first place. Think of it: Can you imagine a major retail corporation setting up shop in New York today? Why would they?

Back then, it made sense: NYC was the center of the world; your buyers needed to be there, your finance people, and of course you needed to be close to your ad men, so you could have a nine-martini lunch, get boiled as owls, and agree that the new fall campaign (“Fall – it's at Penneys”) was genius, brother, pure *hic*! genius.
Upon googling around for some info on the building, I found a brief bio page of the company’s founder, a man with the best name in main-street retail: James Cash Penney. Born in 1875, he not only lived long enough to see the New York HQ erected, he worked there, every day, until his death in 1971. Well, maybe he didn’t come in the last week. It’s quite amazing to think of it – the fellow was old enough to have seen the Woolworth Tower when it was brand new. The Cathedral of Commerce! Some day I shall build one, smaller, with absolutely no ornamentation, and I shall sit in the uppermost floors, wreathed by the clouds, approving pictures of mutton-chopped men in thick brown corduroy suits.

It looks better at the Magic Hour, but they all do.

When I was a kid – yes, I have a macro that automatically types that sentence – I intuited the market position of Penneys from my mother. Before the Mall, downtown had four department stores. Herbst and DeLendrecie’s were the Finer Stores; Penneys was the mid-price decent place, and Sears was just a hair below Penneys, possibly because they made a point of selling tires and screwdrivers as well. In a way Penneys survival seems remarkable, because its longevity seems matched only by the utter lack of any kind of consumer identification. People are content to shop there, but no one ever thinks “I’m a Penneys person!” or claps their hands with delight when they open a Christmas package that contains a Penneys box. It’s the retail equivalent of the Post Office, in a way – monolithic, eternal, dull, unhip despite its endless attempts to demonstrate imagination.

I went to the post office today to mail something, which might be why the analogy came to mind. I’d been meaning to mail the item for a week, but I didn’t know how much postage it would take. Two clerks, each of substantial girth, but different temperments: one was jolly and outgoing, the other irritated and peevish. One gave customers a hi-ho when they came up, a fare-thee-well when they left; the other dealt curt nods and indifference. I drew the latter. But while I was waiting I noticed the signs on the wall; they all forbid certain things. One forbid children sitting on the counter. The other told you to end your cell phone conversation.

Can’t think of any other store that makes such a . . . request. Can you?

Column night, so I’m back to work. On something. Whatever it turns out to be. In the meantime: Lance Lawson returns! Now, at the Stribblog. Later: First Day Covers. See you around.
72 RESPONSES TO thursday, aug. 06

Will says:
August 6, 2009 at 12:26 pm

@bgbear (roger h)
Heh. Reminds me of the “Are You Being Served?” episode where the staff were all competing to do the sales announcements over the PA system. “This is the ladies department: knickers are down today.”

Lileks says:
August 6, 2009 at 12:37 pm

Welcome to the site, Zeb – you’ve made the thread complete!

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 6, 2009 at 12:39 pm

@Will

Will :
@bgbear (roger h)
Heh. Reminds me of the “Are You Being Served?” episode where the staff were all competing to do the sales announcements over the PA system. “This is the ladies department: knickers are down today.”

oh, I may have been channeling Mollie Sugden. . .

If you’ll excused me some lady wants me to help her look for her pussy.

😊

If you’ll excuse me

John Robinson says:
August 6, 2009 at 12:46 pm

As a teenage boy, for me half the fun of Green Acres was its surrealism.

The other half was watching Eva Gabor walk around in her nightie.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 6, 2009 at 12:51 pm

John Robinson :
As a teenage boy, for me half the fun of Green Acres was its surrealism.
The other half was watching Eva Gabor walk around in her nightie.
Yes, but when Ralph Monroe showed up in her white coveralls, Yowza! it was like “Eva Who?”

**Brian Greenberg** says:
August 6, 2009 at 12:54 pm

1301 6th Ave is one of the (lesser known) Rockefeller Center buildings. When I worked at Lehman Brothers, it was my home base for about a year. Not a bad place for a corporate headquarters, but not a retail store.

Also, I'd think that if there are people who look down their noses at JC Penny, they've probably been looking down their noses at The Manhattan Mall for some years now...

**CRJ** says:
August 6, 2009 at 1:23 pm

There's a scene in Green Acres, I think in the first or second episode, where Lisa steps out of the shower and is nude for a few frames before wrapping a towel around herself. Of course you couldn't see anything but a glimpse of her figure. But that's when I realized that she was a hottie, dahling. I think my puberty started the day I saw that.

One of my favorite things about GA was that every time Oliver and Lisa's first meeting was mentioned, it was a different story.

**CRJ** says:
August 6, 2009 at 1:28 pm

Oh, and to this day my dad hates the character of Mr. Kimball. Well, I wouldn't say he hates him, more of a dislike. Not so much of a dislike as an annoyance. No, come to think of it, he DOES hate Mr. Kimball.

**John Robinson** says:
August 6, 2009 at 1:34 pm

I love the way they introduced Alvy Moore's Hank Kimball character: “I'm the county agent. Name's Kimball, Hank Kimball. Well, it's not really 'Kimball Hank Kimball', the Kimball comes at the end. But then that would make me Hank Kimball Kimball … wait a minute…”

**HelloBall** says:
August 6, 2009 at 2:02 pm

CRJ has nailed the Kimball Speech Pattern perfectly. Well, not PERFECTLY.

Uh, where was I? Oh yes, department store chimes! Robert Klein used to translate them while playing his handy-dandy "African thumb piano" and singing the words in the same pitch thusly:

“[PING] .. There's a woman .. [PING] in the girdles .. [PING] .. She's trying to steal one .. [PING] get her!”

PERFECT! Well, not PERFECT...
Zeb Haney says:
August 6, 2009 at 2:05 pm

@Lileks
Thank you sir!

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 6, 2009 at 2:19 pm

The old guy who built the house I live in had a little mini farm going and used a little tractor. I never got it going but I use it for decoration and always refer to it as the Hoyt-Clagwell.

I came across this thread on a tractor discussion board, I think the guy who started in was serious but, the responses are funny and knowing:

cut and paste or click on my name to the left

>>>>http://www.ytmag.com/orphans/messages/80.html<<<<<<

Nixmom says:
August 6, 2009 at 4:11 pm

@ Lou Shoemaker: Minnesota has a Columbia Heights, too–it's a suburb of Minneapolis and isn't exactly what you'd call “hipster” (I can say that, I went to high school there and still live nearby). It's definitely diverse and has lots to recommend it...but the nearest Target is in the next suburb up the road. I enjoyed your link immensely (after I got past “nuh-UH–Target's in Fridley!!”)

Trogdor says:
August 6, 2009 at 4:34 pm

“dings” reminds me of “Blue Light Special” at Kmart, remember those? “Blue Light Special on panty hose, aisle 5, for the next 20 minutes”. Stampede ensues.

boblipton says:
August 6, 2009 at 6:32 pm

To set the record straight, there is a Manhattan Target on 34th Street

Bob

curtsnide says:
August 6, 2009 at 7:33 pm

I still haven't figured out who was being made fun of in Green Acres. Was it everybody from every direction?

Ross says:
August 7, 2009 at 1:21 am

curtsnide: Oh, definitely. Very rarely mean-spirited, though–they tended to aim for spotlighting the absurd in human behavior/societal conventions.
Bill says:
August 7, 2009 at 7:03 am
Surely Green Acres wasn't as surreal as Petticoat Junction, which took the place of the Sears catalog lingerie section as fantasy material for a whole generation of young boys.

Personally I grew up in the Daisy Duke era myself 😊

Bill says:
August 7, 2009 at 7:06 am
Oh, as far as Penneys, the department store strata when I was growing up was:

Penneys -> Sears -> Boston Store -> Gimbel's

with things getting more upscale and expensive as you move up the line.

I still recall the joy with which the Christmas catalogs were anticipated each September…

Rob Moeller says:
August 9, 2009 at 8:17 am
I worked as a manager in the receiving department of this building in the ’70’s when it was still Gimbel's flagship store. My oldest child was born while I worked there and I’ll always remember the warm congratulations of guys who unloaded the trucks. One of the older guys, an institution in the ‘cage’ where they put prices on the high value merchandise slipped a ten dollar bill into my hand ‘for the baby’. I’ve often wondered since then, how many hours pay that ten spot represented. BTW, Gimbels occupied all 11 floors of the building most as sales floors and there was no place for trucks to back in to unload. All merchandise for the store was unloaded at street level on pallets on the sidewalk and rolled into freight elevators for movement to the actual ‘receiving’ areas on the 11th and 4th floors and in the second level sub basement….yes, that’s what they called it and you had to walk past a trash incinerator with doors as big as the pit of hell to get to where I worked.

D T Nelson says:
August 12, 2009 at 8:43 am
Reading about James Cash Penney always reminds me of this fact I read about him many years ago: Whenever he was interviewing a prospective hire, he would take the man to lunch. If the man salted his food before tasting it, he would not get the job, for that was a man who made decisions without getting the facts first.

Fred says:
August 13, 2009 at 8:16 am
Hmmm, how many people have heard the rumor that JC Penney stood for “Jesus Christ” Penney and was named that because the founder was a devout Christian. And that the name was only changed to Penney's on his death when he couldn't prevent it from happening anymore?
It seems I may be starting the imminent Fortnight of Sporadic Updates a bit early here. Thursday night are turning into the busiest night of the week, what with the column and the blog and the NewsBreak scripting. (Friday's episode should be good – no John Hughes tribute, but only because everyone else will have beaten the highlight reel to death by noon tomorrow, and I wasn't up for scouring the web to find choice clips of Judd Nelson flexing his gloved fists and glowering, Juddly.) It's a mad farrago of typing and walking away, periodically, to keep the dog from eating the baby bunnies.

There are three of them, huddled in the cave he dug under the playset. They consume his imagination. The only way I could get him to stay away tonight was to set up sprinklers to inundate the perimeter; he hates water. At first I thought the bunnies were gone, but Mama Bunny had correctly evaluated the situation – gigantic predator lives here – and decided to relocate the brood 17 inches to the right. At least she covered them with stinky bunny fluff. The dog was not fooled. I don't think he'd eat them, but he might snout them around a bit.

Anyway. Here's the list of stuff for today: a big update in Comic Ads – retro bike ads this time – and of course 100 Mysteries. A piece on a local designer who turned out some incredible beer packaging ads here, at the Stribblog. NewsBreak, with your host in a suit, a little after noon.

And now, the inevitable Friday Big Topic:
Name something you know, but you’re reasonably certain few other people know. I don’t mean your spouse or partner’s shoe size. Something germane to your profession, or hobby, or just something you’ve picked up. Between all of us, we know everything, but it’s distributed amongst us.

I repeat: Name something you know, but you’re reasonably certain few other people know. By the end of the day we’ll all be so much smarter for this.

See you ASAP.

---

Pass it along, if you wish

243 RESPONSES TO *friday! august 07*

**John Robinson** says:
August 7, 2009 at 3:42 pm

My toes are webbed. Srsly. No one knows this but my wife and some close–very close–friends. And now the world knows. I feel complete, somehow…

**Bridey** says:
August 7, 2009 at 6:01 pm

“I know why vector orthogonality is important to your use of a CDMA cell phone.”

And you’re not going to *tell* us? How can you leave us hanging like that?

**Doug Smith** says:
August 7, 2009 at 6:03 pm

I know a lot of baseball stuff. For example, John Smoltz is the only pitcher in major league history to have both 200 wins and 150 saves.

**dcmatthews** says:
August 7, 2009 at 6:20 pm

Sorry, but this falls under “cultural trivia” (possibly even “pop cultural trivia”):

In addition to his role as Lurch on *The Addams Family*, Ted Cassidy also portrayed Thing.

**John Robinson** says:
August 7, 2009 at 6:22 pm

And he had a lovely Irish tenor voice.

I guess. What do I know?

**Will** says:
August 7, 2009 at 6:36 pm
@Trogdor, the phrase you're looking for is “chiaroscuro shading.” If you haven't found it yet bookmark hrwiki.org. All Homestar Runner all the time.

CJrun says:
August 7, 2009 at 6:36 pm

Here's something you don't know. In the Gulf of Mexico there are an estimated 4 times the amount of natural gas reserves as their are of crude oil (check the EPA website for yourself). The skew is vastly greater when you get to the Eastern Gulf, off Florida, where I live.

However, whenever news stories or politicians refer to the issue, they always, ALWAYS, use the phrase “oil drilling”. That's an impact to the language created by environmentalists, because it links readily to oil spill. Now, I'm a Marine Biologist that doesn't like oil spills, but it irks me that folks confuse the discussion.

Here's another: I'm 49 years old and have worked on cleaning up oil spills during much of my career. You know where 99.99% of oil spills come from? Tankers, bringing in imported oil. The more you know.

DavidR says:
August 7, 2009 at 6:48 pm

A dominant chord wants to resolve to a tonic, sometimes with gin.

mezzrow says:
August 7, 2009 at 7:21 pm

Since it is a cylindrical tube, the clarinet overblows a twelfth rather than octave. The saxophone, on the other hand, is a conical tube, and overblows an octave. That is one reason that the key used to overblow to the upper register is known as a register key on the clarinet, but is known as the octave key on the saxophone.

Doug Sundseth says:
August 7, 2009 at 7:31 pm

Bridey :
“I know why vector orthogonality is important to your use of a CDMA cell phone."
And you're not going to tell us? How can you leave us hanging like that?

Since you asked so nicely:

The orthogonality is core to the “Code Division” part of CDMA. With orthogonal codes, multiple conversation cans be broadcast simultaneously on the same frequency and then the desired conversation can be extracted from the “noise” at the receiver. For more information, search on “Walsh Code”.

Gabriel Hanna says:
August 7, 2009 at 7:50 pm

1) Lightning doesn't strike the highest thing, the closest thing, the
isolated thing, or the metal thing.

I first learned this when I saw a lightning strike travel from several miles away to hit a short tree at the BOTTOM of a hill, ignoring all the much taller trees and hills in the area.

I was intrigued by this enough to look into it. Everything you have ever heard about lightning is wrong.

People have been struck by lightning while in their houses.

In Roman times, anything that had been struck by lightning was considered to have deeply angered the gods in some way; and so they built high walls around whatever it was. Which seems very sensible.

2) There is no such thing as being “thrown clear” of an accident. People who have been “thrown clear” of accidents are called, by paramedics, “corpses pre-extracted for your convenience”.

Would you jump off a motorcycle, or out a car window, at 50 miles an hour? Then why would you want to be “thrown clear” of an accident? This is why motorcycle accidents are so much more serious than car accidents-the motorcyclist is almost always “thrown clear”.

http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/motorcycle/?table_sort_739024=5

Motorcyclists were 35 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in a crash per vehicle mile traveled in 2006 and eight times more likely to be injured, according to NHTSA.

The fatality rate per registered vehicle for motorcyclists in 2007 was 6 times the fatality rate for passenger car occupants, according to NHTSA.

I don’t have anything against motorcycles. But the laws of physics are not mocked.

Once in a while you will hear of someone who lived and wasn’t wearing a seat belt, and of someone else who died and was wearing one. These cases are so rare as to be newsworthy—yet some people seem to have the impression that seat belts are UNSAFE. Which brings me to number 3:

3) The plural of “anecdote” is not “data”. Okay, lots of people have heard this one. But what IS data? It is a ratio. To have “data”, you need a sum of anecdotes in the NUMERATOR, but you need to get a DENOMINATOR from somewhere, and that’s what “control group” means. How many people lived after being “thrown clear” of the car: numerator. How many people were “thrown clear”, total who lived AND died: denominator. Do this calculation for seat belts vs being “thrown clear”, and you will learn why cars have seat belts and not ejection seats.

hpoulter says:
August 7, 2009 at 8:00 pm

@MAdcanada

“Some little-known facts about President Barack Obama:

1) He’s a Christian.
2) He’s half-Caucasian.
3) He is a social/economic Centrist.
4) He was born in the USA.”
1 – who cares?
2 – ditto (and well known)
3 – yeah, by Venezuelan or Zimbabwean standards.
4 – probably

Dmath says:
August 7, 2009 at 8:29 pm

It's virtually impossible for any gun to “go off” while being cleaned. The trigger has to be deliberately pulled to fire any gun made since about the 1930s, and hardly anybody is stupid enough to get out oil and a cloth and start rubbing the trigger vigorously.

No, wait, lots of people are stupid enough to do that. I take it back.

Bridey says:
August 7, 2009 at 9:01 pm

Doug Sundseth :

Bridey :
“ I know why vector orthogonality is important to your use of a CDMA cell phone.”
And you’re not going to tell us? How can you leave us hanging like that?

Since you asked so nicely:
The orthogonality is core to the “Code Division” part of CDMA. With orthogonal codes, multiple conversation cans be broadcast simultaneously on the same frequency and then the desired conversation can be extracted from the “noise” at the receiver. For more information, search on “Walsh Code”.

Thank you! I love that kind of stuff.

Marie says:
August 7, 2009 at 9:02 pm

I know what double predestination is.

To believe in predestination, you believe that God decided from before time that He is going to save you. If you believe in double predestination, you believe He also decided from the beginning of time if you are going to hell.

Shane S says:
August 7, 2009 at 9:16 pm

I know what Einstein won the Nobel prize for. I mean, I not only know that he won it for his explanation of the photoelectric effect, but also have a decent grasp on just what that is and why it is important.

Nancy says:
August 7, 2009 at 9:27 pm

Buzz Kill@madCanada
Steelkily says:
August 7, 2009 at 9:50 pm

Human flesh causes painful intestinal gas.

Kev says:
August 7, 2009 at 10:54 pm

Most (but not quite all) Armenian last names end in “ian” or “yan” (exhaustive list here). That means that “Armenian” itself could be an Armenian name.

re the “forte” pronounced as “fort” thing: “Fort” may be more correct, but this may be a case where the language has evolved (incorrect pronunciation and all) to avoid confusion. Example: If you say something is your “fort,” most people, without the benefit of being able to look at the written word, will assume that you’re talking about a military installation or that little clubhouse you built in your backyard as a kid. (And the relationship between the French word and the Italian musical term has a very loose connection—if you’re really good at something, you might well proclaim it loudly (the Italian “forte”).

@mezzrow: Are you a fellow saxophonist, or do you just know about octave key vs. register key?

Kev says:
August 7, 2009 at 11:02 pm

Speaking of forte: The formal name for the piano is the pianoforte, as invented by the Italian Bartolomeo Cristofori in 1700. The name comes from the fact that the instrument is capable of playing all the dynamic levels between piano (soft) and forte (loud)—something which earlier keyboard instruments, such as the harpsichord and clavichord (the latter of which is not your collarbone), were not able to do. (Many times people, without knowing the above, are surprised to discover that piano means soft, because the piano is often associated with loudness, especially if parents let their three-year-old run wild in the music store.)

I got to see an original Cristofori piano at the Smithsonian during a traveling exhibit in 2000. It was behind a velvet rope with an armed guard nearby.

CJrun says:
August 8, 2009 at 5:07 am

“re the “forte” pronounced as “fort” thing: “Fort” may be more correct, but this may be a case where the language has evolved (incorrect pronunciation and all) to avoid confusion.”

Dissection is an example of this. Think about it: pronounce dichotomy; got how “di” sounds? Now pronounce disappear, disfunctional, or disaster. Knowing the difference, how would you pronounce dissection?

For so many years we have heard science teachers or pundits pronounce it to rhyme with bisection (to cut in half), that it is futile to attempt to correct that and seems stilted when pronounced correctly. A few years back I started noticing that even dictionaries were including the incorrect pronunciation as an option, but you won't find that in older dictionaries.
KBoom says:
August 8, 2009 at 5:43 am

Armadillos are not lured into traps by cat food.

cgm says:
August 8, 2009 at 1:12 pm

I know the solution to the equivalence problem for sub-Finsler contact 3-manifolds, and I would be very, very surprised if anyone cared.

swschrad says:
August 8, 2009 at 1:40 pm

I now know how to upload an avatar at gravatar-dot-com.

that is Your Benevolent Dictator on his ice throne. tremble and obey.

would you believe shiver?

would you believe cross to the other side of the street quickly?

Jimmie says:
August 8, 2009 at 4:07 pm

Roger Ritter:
One obscure pop culture note – In Star Wars Ep. IV, when Han and Luke find out where the princess is being kept, it’s in cell block 1138. This an homage to George Lucas’ first commercial movie, THX-1138.

So far as I know, there’s a “1138” in every one of Lucas’ films.

Jimmie says:
August 8, 2009 at 4:12 pm

Marjorie J. Birch:
Ampersands occasionally replace the word “and” because the character is actually “et” — Latin for “and”. It’s more obvious if you look at an italic ampersand in, say, Goudy or Caslon.

That is also why the term “et cetera” is often abbreviated “&c”. The ampersand is an example of a logogram, which is a single character formed from the combination of two or more characters (the & is a blending of the letters e and t).

madCanada says:
August 8, 2009 at 9:11 pm

Hello. FYI. Interesting little-known historical factoid HERE:

The infamous Ku Klux Klan “Burning Cross” was never used in the historical Reconstruction period.

It was a fictional embellishment, invented by author Thomas Dixon in his 1905 novel “The Clansman” (inspired by Sir Walter Scott's medieval romance “Lady of the Lake”). This image was further
branded by director D.W. Griffith in his 1915 film “Birth of a Nation”.

Later that year, the newly-re-born 20th century “Ku Klux Klan” adopted this symbol in a dramatic gesture, burning a giant cross atop Stone Mountain, GA. The rest is history.

A lil' Americana for ya. Have a nice nation.

Courtney says:
August 8, 2009 at 9:44 pm

You don't actually need to do anything to catch a virus on your computer. Just turning it on and letting it sit there connected to the Internet (through cable modem) is enough.

Most home computers have at least one virus and the owners aren't even aware because it has no symptoms...until the virus writer wants it to.

DryOwlTacos says:
August 8, 2009 at 11:09 pm

**Dave (in MA):** Cornish Rex cats smell like cheese.

My Cornish Rex cat smells like a cat, akshully.

DryOwlTacos says:
August 8, 2009 at 11:27 pm

You and your first cousins have the same grandparents; you and your second cousins have the same great-grandparents (and so on).

The child of your first cousin is your first cousin once removed; the grandchild is twice removed (and so on).

That's how Dick Cheney and Barack Obama are eighth cousins—they have the same great(x8)-grandparents!

Moishe3rd says:
August 9, 2009 at 7:48 am

The late Queen Mother of England, Elizabeth Bowes Lyon, was my great-grandmother's third cousin, which makes Queen Elizabeth my fourth cousin twice removed.

Reese says:
August 9, 2009 at 4:39 pm

I like these later comments. Very bizarre. Speaking of which I know that the binding energy of a deuteron is about 2.2 MeV. Came up at work last week. SWCHRAD, if you'd like a gamma spectrum (self-generated colors of light you can't normally see) of one of your thorated tubes, let me know. I can do it in my spare time.

bgates says:
August 10, 2009 at 2:12 am

OK, so the point of breathing is to transfer high-energy electrons to
oxygen. That's how respiration works in humans. But there are some species of bacteria that use other substances as electron acceptors. A few can “breathe” uranium.

#2. Put your thumb under your eyebrow, touching your upper eyelid. You can feel a little indentation in the bone under the eyebrow. Press into it and you'll get an incredible headache.

grayhackle says:
August 10, 2009 at 7:54 am

In the movie 'Tombstone', Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday fires a double-barrelled shotgun three times without re-loading. Neat trick.

juanito - John Davey says:
August 10, 2009 at 9:46 am

grayhackle :
In the movie 'Tombstone', Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday fires a double-barrelled shotgun three times without re-loading. Neat trick.

But, he'll be your huckleberry…

Trogdor says:
August 10, 2009 at 9:49 am

@Steelkily
Steelkily scares Trogdor, the fartinator.

Trogdor says:
August 10, 2009 at 10:05 am

I now know that rebooting my laptop after loading up icons on Gravatar makes them appear. I'll blame it on cache.

RE: Forte, how about the word Primer, when it's a written instruction it's pronounced with a short i, as in Pristine. Not like the paint undercoat.

@MadCanada, glad to know that Canada is perfect in every way. Here's to bright copper kettles, cream colored ponies, crisp apple strudel and fluffy unicorns.

jondru says:
August 10, 2009 at 1:17 pm

@ mezzrow: one detail on the overblown instruments: the clarinet overblows to the twelfth because it is both cylindrical AND stopped at one end (at least as far as acoustics is concerned). The flute, for example, is also cylindrical, but, being acoustically an open tube, overblows to the octave.

If you ever hear “Stars & Stripes Forever” at the circus, run for your life. It is also known as the “Disaster March,” and is used in the circus (and sometimes the theater) as a signal to the crew to evacuate everyone immediately. It's unmistakable, most musicians in such venues have it memorized, and it cues the staff without directly alarming the audience. A famous example of this use was the 1944 Hartford circus tent fire.
Extreme trivia: a survivor of the Hartford fire was Charles Nelson Reilly.

**hpouler says:**
August 10, 2009 at 2:45 pm

“primer” is pronounced just like the paint undercoat – in Britain. I once got into an ugly argument with some Brits who were using that as an example of American stupidity and claimed that English words are pronounced as they are spelled! Ha! Which English word changes its vowel sound when it is capitalized? polish! (Polish). If spelling were logical, you would “pollish” your shoes.

**Ross says:**
August 11, 2009 at 2:09 am

Those of you who didn’t hear the word “bubbler” used in eastern Wisconsin–it’s partly a generational thing. Between the post-war influx of out-of-staters and the influence of TV (and the flattening of regionalisms/desire of post-TV generations not to sound provincial), the habit is dying out. Even people who say “bubbler” among family & friends default to some other term in public now.

Here’s another linguistic/typographical tidbit: that cheesey “Ye Olde Shoppe” sign, leaving aside the supposed harkening back to when spelling of many words wasn’t standardized, is still just “THE Old Shop”. The confusion arises from the separate letter used in Old English to represent a “soft” or voiced “th” (as in “these”): it’s sort of a lower-case “d” with a diagonal crossbar through the stem, which when sloppily written/printed, looks like the modern “y”.

**Peter Dietz says:**
August 11, 2009 at 11:46 am

Lone Ranger trivia:

The Lone Ranger’s sidekick is called “Tonto” which is Spanish for “stupid.”

Tonto calls the Lone Ranger “Kemosabe” which is a slightly altered version of “que no sabe” which is also Spanish for “stupid.”

There, now you too can be the life of all the parties you attend!

**JosePluma says:**
August 12, 2009 at 1:28 pm

If you have AB- blood, don’t bother donating blood. Since this blood type is a universal receiver but can only be given to other AB- patients (who can receive any blood type). The plasma, on the other hand, is a universal donor and very needed.

**margaret says:**
August 12, 2009 at 2:40 pm

I have AB- blood. How do I donate plasma without donating blood?
We have bunnies:

More on that, or rather them, in a bit.
Summer came back late, but at least it came back. Friday night a torrent hit the cities, accompanied by the usual drama. I was up late watching a movie – there’s a shock – and hence levitated about six inches out of the sofa when the king-hell crack split the world in two. It was loud and it was close and it killed the juice dead. The emergency lights snapped on – I have small lights inserted in various underused outlets, and they cast cones of lights on the wall as if I’d been pitched into a nightmare based on Nazi propaganda movies. Immediate problem: wife and child had to get up at 6:45, and lateness would be a very bad thing. So. What to do? Sit on the steps and post a tweet, of course. Then I set up some alarms using various battery-operated clocks, set my phone to make the most annoying sound possible (It’s a loop of an MC saying “Ladies and Gentlemen, Carrot Top!”) and went to bed.

I had been watching “Wanted,” which the Giant Swede endorsed as a fun, “over the top” action movie, but I was in one of those moods where I just can’t believe that bullets can curve, or people can shoot the wings off flies, or Angelina Jolie doesn’t look like square-headed and overlipped. I bailed, and was just watching something or other when the power died. That’s been the plot of this summer, alas: something or other. It’s been busy, it’s been good, but it’s never felt like summer, true summer, hot, hard, blaring oh-when-will-it-end summer. You wait so long, and then this: it’s the Phantom Menace of summers. Jar-Jar Binks should do the weather.

I need to do something else, and it’s not this. So if you’ll permit me a few weeks of intermittent updates, I believe I’ll take them. All the usual updates will be suspended. The Strib blog will have daily updates, more or less, since that’s paying work. Twitter: yes. But I just need to do something different – and believe me, I’ll be back with ten tons of stuff.

**Note:** There will be a large picture-type update tomorrow, so stop back.

**Note** the second: The bunny story, with guest star Jasper Dog, concludes over at the Strib blog.
Mr_Lilacs says:
August 10, 2009 at 5:31 pm

Current dog kept his prior rather doggy name when we got him as an adult. Our vet habitually adds “bear” to the end of his name, oddly enough.

Our future dogs will have people names that are an inside joke.

Trogdor says:
August 10, 2009 at 5:39 pm

@juanito – John Davey
Maybe a little more odd than my lab Henry, but his list of destruction is long too, but the WORST was chewing the cable box off the side of the house 3 days before the Super Bowl. I was able to splice it back together in the freezing cold that night, but I was so PO'd, and he knew it. He actually got a lot better right after that.

Mikey NTH says:
August 10, 2009 at 5:52 pm

Names? Flopsy, Mopsy, and Nietzsche!


The fourth can be Peter – lots of tradition there. Sorry Cottontail.

lanczos says:
August 10, 2009 at 6:03 pm

James – You FOOL! Jasper was trying to TELL YOU: They're Killer Rabbits like the one in MP & The Holy Grail. Run For Your Life!

Kim says:
August 10, 2009 at 7:35 pm

Hey – for everyone who hates that new Blog o' Things layout, try contacting “contact at startribune dot com” and let them know, if you haven't already. I did, and got two responses.

Apparently they are migrating all the bloggers over and will re-evaluate the format once that is done. If you haven't written it couldn't hurt. Re-evaluate doesn't necessarily mean “change” so let's tell them hear us!

Kim says:
August 10, 2009 at 7:35 pm

Oh, and for the bunnies? Andy, Opie, Barney and Gomer

Marjorie J. Birch says:
August 10, 2009 at 7:46 pm

again with the voles--

my late grandfather called them tiddley-wops. No one knows why. (He is dead, and does not respond to the Ouija board, so we can’t ask
hmm directly.) Anyone out there have any information, clues, theories?

MikeH says:
August 10, 2009 at 8:02 pm

Growing up we did have one cat with a unusual name. His nickname was Dave. His full proper name was Dave The Cat. Most of the time I would for real call him by his full name, responded to that more than his nickname.

DryOwlTacos says:
August 10, 2009 at 9:37 pm

Most all our cats have had “human” names. Sometimes they get mail! I almost sent off for Louie's AARP card–hey, he was 14 at the time, that's like 70 in people years.

HT says:
August 10, 2009 at 10:17 pm

Dry Owl Tacos: depends. If Louis is an indoor cat, 14 is the equivalent of about 60 in human years. If he was an outdoor cat, however, it's like 325.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
August 10, 2009 at 10:19 pm

bgbear (roger h):
@Wramblin' Wreck
Are you related to a school teacher named Lynch?
Anjelico, Fernilico, Moo-Moo, Senior Twiginsky, Sanchi-San.

Bear, thank you for asking. Yes I am. My maternal grandmother's 3rd great aunt's daughter's beautician's uncle's best man taught kindergarten calculus in Reno Jct., Wy.

Actually, as far as I know, I am not related to anyone named Lynch. My mother was a schoolteacher but her name was not Lynch. I take it that you know someone else who names cats unusually.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
August 10, 2009 at 10:20 pm

I would name the 4th rabbit ‘stoo’ and be satisfied.

Shaky Barnes says:
August 10, 2009 at 10:51 pm

James if you're not going to update the blog can I at least come stay at your house, so you can tell me funny anecdotes 2 or 3 times a day and then let me watch one of your old movies?

hpoulter says:
August 11, 2009 at 5:13 am

Well, the summer drought has started – buggah. Hope the host is
getting his batteries recharged.

With the Buzz, we could post our own content.

I really wouldn’t name the rabbits. Jasper might forget himself.

Voles are diddley-wops? Sounds kinda random. I know why some people call rabbits “conies”, but not that one.

Maybe it’s a Grandpa Simpson thing: “Back in my day, all the squirrels were voles, only we called them diddley wops. We used to put them down our pants before dancing to records by Enrico ‘The Italian Bo Diddley’ Bastardi.”

Lilicat says:
August 11, 2009 at 8:32 am

You may borrow our Persian cat Lili. She is not called the Voleminator for no reason.

She also brings home baby bunnies to play with, but is disgusted that they break so easily. The look on her face says clearly: Sheesh, look what happened. Can’t they make these things better?

And since we are talking about names, I’ve had Bump, the Russian Blue (21 years) and our recently-deceased feral cat, Black Kitty (10 – 11 years). So the cat names in our family range from the odd to the normal to the obvious. The weirdest dog name I ever knew was a keeshond named Frijpahn (frypan). Yes, there's a story.

SWBart says:
August 11, 2009 at 8:44 am

I don’t know if it works for voles, but my dad used to hook an old vacuum cleaner hose to the tail pipe of our old Buick and put the other end into gopher holes and let it idle for a couple hours. It worked fairly well on pocket gophers.

Dora Standpipe says:
August 11, 2009 at 8:38 am

My brother named his dog “Wilma” just so he could put his head out the door and yell her name. WillllMaaaa!!!!

Trogdor says:
August 11, 2009 at 11:07 am

@Lilicat
That is a good idea, however, I live in the forest, and outdoor cats life expectancy is only 3 years due to the large number of foxes and coyotes.

We have an indoor cat “Tortie”, again named because the sign on the shelter cage said “Tortoise Shell”. We’re not very original. But maybe I can go to the shelter and get another cat for outdoors…my wife wouldn’t like it though, sacrificing a cat soul just to free my yard from vole holes.

Seattle_Dave says:
August 11, 2009 at 11:39 am

@MikeH That is an excellent name for a cat.
Ross says:
August 12, 2009 at 12:23 am

I come from farm stock on my mother’s side of the family, so they tend to be pretty mundane/obvious about animal names, but my own tend to be people names. With our cats, we were going (at one time) for a ladies’ bowling team: Judy, Mavis, Roxie, etc. Maybe the best cat names were a little b/w stray & a regal black oriental that ended up with my mother named Figaro & Susanna. He was actually named for Ferdinand the Bull’s pal, but when she came along, he got a double meaning to his name. My mother, who cannot bear to call any animal by its name, even when she picked it, insisted on calling the female “Suki”. Wonder if that habit’s related to the fact that she has never said the right name on the first try for any of us three siblings (even crossing gender lines, in recent years).

Fred says:
August 14, 2009 at 1:31 pm

I do hope that the blog format at the Strib does change to more than 1 line of the blog entry. It’s not like they don’t have the space. Kinda cheap way to increase page views by only allowing 5 comments to appear at a time… Ah well, it’s free, and you get what you pay for.
default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
Still on vacation - CAN'T YOU TELL? Here's today's non-entry entry, which is just an illusion. The other day I dropped in to Hunt and Gather, to see if I could find an item my wife almost bought me for my birthday. She described it as a metal platter for some soft drink, with a pixie or a sprite, 50s / 60s style. I figured it was a White Rock item, and went to investigate it. Didn't find it. Found enough matches to take us to the end of the year (not counting the six-year supply I've already scanned, which is poor quality) and some other items.

Change-0 Clown, the burn-victim skull-thing:
No eyes, no mouth, no nose, a melted face, but the hat assures jocularity along the usual clown lines. (Shudder)

This, being 50 cents, was an easy purchase:
If only to save it from destruction. What did the pin stick into? Some of that strange light foam you always found at the houses of relatives who arranged fake flowers? Meat? A lieve of fruit, sacrificed for the sale of the rest?

Stale coffee woes are over:
Nash was part of Nash Finch, I'm sure – a local company that's still around, and one of the largest grocery wholesale distributors in the country.

I never quite understood this name as a kid:
And I still don't, but it's somewhat clearer now.

A kid's record, sold at Woolworth's:

1950. It pops up elsewhere on the web; they must have made quite a few. No MP3 versions can be found, alas.

Outside, rusting away to beautiful ruin:
Is that scale accurate? I should say so, my good man; it's made entirely of steel.

Finally:
I'll post some of the interior when I get the 1939 site up. (Someday.)

Oh, one more thing. You may recall the jaunty ceramic pots from the last trip to H&G. Found the same artist, doing a happy flower pot. You can imagine the wife showing it to the husband: *Doncha love it?*

![Ceramic flower pot](https://i.imgur.com/3Q5Q5Q5.png)

---

**67 RESPONSES TO *Tuesday, August 11***

**Bob W. says:**
August 12, 2009 at 9:17 am

“That's probably a very small 78: I remember having a couple of similar “Little Golden Records" and our prewar Philco console certainly didn't play anything else.”

Or it might even be a 16, if it was more a lengthy spoken story than a song. Apparently it was thought you didn't need that great of sound quality in a kids record, and as I recall the few 16's I've seen had the hole for the small spindle.
Kev says:
August 12, 2009 at 9:21 am

James writes “…A lieve of fruit”

I love typos like that. Do you think he meant a leaf? A loaf? A sleeve?

Any guesses?

I just looked up “lleve” to make sure that our host wasn’t using some obscure word that was new to most of us. But nope, the only thing that pops up is a couple of forms of the Spanish verb llevar, meaning “to take” or “to carry.” So unless he was trying to say “a take of fruit” (which sounds like the fruit was either personally harvested or won at an auction), then yes, an amusing typo.

Deana says:
August 12, 2009 at 9:36 am

A 1939 site?!? I swoon. Perhaps it will not grieve me as the Gerlernter book did. I have an unhealthy 1939 NYWF addiction to the point that my kids think the satellite dish we can see on a mountain top across from our house is the Perisphere. and the radio tower is the Trylon. Bless ‘em.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 12, 2009 at 10:12 am

Well call me Ishmael, Ishmael Gray that is. I was wrong about design alone (bad patent search which is sort of like my job).

Press on my name to the left to see image of US1738892 (improvement over US1410402 03/21/1922).

Issued patent 1,738,892 12/10/1929 Ishmael H. Gray:

This invention relates to a swinging support for price tags and the like.

The chief object of this invention is to provide a relatively cheap, substantially permanently connected assembly of few parts adapted to swingingly (sic) support a price tag or the like.

it is designed to be able to place price tags on shelves that could move out of the way and not get knocked off by customers in apparently self service stores. The wire is definitely part of the original design in a version where it sticks into the shelf.

Jennifer says:
August 12, 2009 at 10:23 am

My take on the price signage is a little different. I think the original design allowed the tab at the bottom to insert into a slot (perhaps a metal clip attached to shelves had the slot–or a “swinging support” as noted in the patent description). This allowed for quick price changes. It looks as if the piece was stapled at one time, but then wisely shifted to a pin with the wire twist at the top. If the pin is original, it’s an option to the tab/slot use.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 12, 2009 at 10:39 am

@Jennifer
You are correct, the pin goes into clip on the shelf, the clip is below
the tag rather than above in the earlier patent.

The improvement seems to add extra flexibility or swing at the pivot point.

I am not much of an engineer which is why I do support work at the firm 😇

I'll try to post the earlier patent image somehow. The USPTO uses an odd plug-in for images.

**HunkybobTX** says:
August 12, 2009 at 11:04 am

I tried looking for patents on the price tag. No luck with anything obvious. I wonder what exactly was patented? A spring loaded card holder? A way of advertising a price? A printing process? A stick pin sign holder? a kind of card material?

**bgbear (roger h)** says:
August 12, 2009 at 11:37 am

@HunkybobTX
it is all right there in my post, numbers and all. Simply it is a price tag holder that would not be in customers' way and that customers would not knock over.

here are some more with the later pin:

>>>http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2378/2328663267_efc7f3ae62.jpg<<<

**HunkyBobTX** says:
August 12, 2009 at 11:51 am

@bgbear (roger h)
I swear I didn't see your comment... Thanks.

**bgbear (roger h)** says:
August 12, 2009 at 12:20 pm

**HunkyBobTX**:
@bgbear (roger h)
I swear I didn't see your comment... Thanks.

It's OK, I feel like a geek finding it.

**Jennifer** says:
August 12, 2009 at 2:07 pm

@bgbear (roger h)
Thanks! I feel pretty savvy right now. I work in print production and have worked on a lot of point-of-sale, so I geek out on this stuff as well.

**Suzanne Goldman** says:
August 12, 2009 at 3:13 pm

Have my own little "obsession" with coffee tins. Love the Butter Nut you have there. Also the Nash. Folgers in those plastic jugs doesn't
Those little “one shots” are a little annoying as well. I need more than just “one” cup of coffee in the morning, more like a cup and a half. Clip here sure would wake me up in the morning.. some stranger hanging from my ceiling and all..

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jY4wAMhjFEU

John Robinson says:
August 12, 2009 at 4:57 pm

I dunno. It also looks pretty cool to jab your little sister in the fanny with. ::boink:: “MOM-M-M-M!!"

Jimmy H says:
August 12, 2009 at 9:18 pm

James writes “…A lieve of fruit"

I love typos like that. Do you think he meant a leaf? A loaf? A sleeve?

Any guesses?

I will guess “piece” “p” is close to “l” on the keyboard as “v” is close to “c”.

John says:
August 12, 2009 at 9:51 pm

The World’s Fair road map probably should go with the World’s Fair subway, which was built just for the 1939-40 Fair, and then abandoned (New York City built it on their self-owned Independent system to compete against the two private companies operating on what is today’s Flushing Line. I suppose it’s also worth noting that the city prohibited the two private lines from raising their base fare above five cents and forced them into bankruptcy during the second year of the fair, while the city charged customers an additional five cents to ride on their World’s Fair line. Not quite national health care vs. private insurers, but the similarities are interesting).

Ross says:
August 13, 2009 at 2:14 am

I don’t recall typing anything scandalous in my comment last night, so what, good mine host, made it disappear?

Greg VA says:
August 13, 2009 at 2:38 am

I found a world’s fair item I would like to share from my blog: http://videomartyr.blogspot.com/2009/05/worlds-fair-lifes-not.html

It’s just a spoon, but what a cool spoon. Again I say, this is a great site(s)
Still not finding what you’re looking for?
Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!
Back porch, south Fargo, summer night. First summer night all summer. Dad's describing where the flood dike was, how that tree came back despite everyone's assumptions it was a goner, how the local homeowner's association takes care of things. Including mosquitos. I note that I haven't been bitten yet.

"Not one this year," says Doris, his wife.

"They're out here spraying all the time," Dad says. Then he slaps his forearm.

Mosquito. Damned things. The most persistent form of life on the planet, perhaps. Dennis Prager always says he'd like to ask God: why the mosquito? What purpose does it serve? I've heard an answer: to remind the noblest king that he, too, is human, and hence not immune.

An hour later I'm sitting in my dad's kitchen, one day after my birthday, which was also the anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing. He tells me he'd been contacted to add some recollections — if he had any — of rescuing prisoners of war from Formosa. As it happened, he did. Like all the other stories, I'd never heard this one; he never talks about it. Part of it had to do with sparing the kids the horror stories and putting it all behind him, but on the other hand I've never met anyone who lives in the present like my Dad. He's not one for backward glances. Which is why his peers doze in
Barcaloungers, and he hits the highway on his Harley, I suspect.

He said they'd steamed to Formosa after the surrender. What about the surrender? What was that like? He said the Block Island was 100 miles off Japan, sending bombers to the island. There was general happiness, as you might imagine: “We had a party on the deck. The ship's band played, and they got the beer out of stores – two bottles apiece.” Then off to Formosa to haul off the wounded. He was on a small skiff shuttling between the mainland and the ship, putting the men in nets so they could be winched up to the deck. They were all thin. Some were in horrible shape.

They were survivors of the Bataan Death March.

Earlier that evening I'd shown his wife some things I'd put on the website, including the World's Fair map.

“Oh, I loved the World's Fair,” she said. “I went there with my dad when I was 11.”

Of course: she was a Brooklyn gal. But it's like hearing someone went to Oz, isn't it? You were at the 1939 World's Fair. And here you are in a kitchen in Fargo in the ninth year of the 21st century.

She remembered Futurama, and the Trylon and Perisphere.

Dad's doing fine. On one hand, he mentioned 3 times over 3 days the necessity of observing the large Mars we'll see in late August. Yes, Dad, I know, you told me. So there's that.

On the other hand, he's looking forward to a big red Mars. So there's that, and it's good.

On the gripping hand, we spent about half an hour trying to find his GPS CD for his car. He had the CD case, but it contained Disk Two of some Irish tenor. I explained that he would not be able to use it to get turn-by-turn instructions in a Danny-Boy singing voice. I think there's an age after which all CDs migrate to different CD cases. But he pointed out something quite sensible: in this vehicle, he knows where he's going. What's the point?

Later: I'm at Valvoline Instant Oil Change, where it takes 20 minutes. Apparently that “instant” is like a “day” in a literal reading of Genesis. Ten minutes to upselling of filters and fluids.

Breakfast early in the morning – Dad was up two hours before I was, of course. Ate at the Village Inn, which uses the Neutra typeface. Everyone does. It's either Neutra or the Obamafont. Gives everything a 30s feel, to go along with, well, the 30s feel elsewhere. But not here: we drove past miles and miles of new development, and I asked my dad when the recession would slow this all down. “There's no recession,” he said. “Not in Fargo.”

We went out to the station. OMG it's GONE
Actually, no. The old station was on that spot. See the circle? I knew without asking: the location of the pneumatic hoist. I walked around the imaginary station, remembering where things had been. Here was the automatic chamois wringer. Here was the pop machine where I had my first Mountain Dew. Here was the customer waiting room with the card of combs and the card of Evergreen-Tree air-fresheners with the blonde doll in the red dress. There, out beyond the grave, was the concrete apron that formed the foundation for his first foray into food service, the outdoor vending machines – why, I can see them like it was yesterday.
Dad said this wasn’t the greatest investment. The vending machines sold sandwiches, heated in an early microwave that had doors so thick the customer was convinced plutonium was involved. The roast beef got a peek of the plutonium, just for a second. If you ever had one of those meals, you know the horror – terrycloth bread, vinyl meat, smeary watery melted cheese. Awful.

These are the pillars for the store’s sign. They said Texaco at first, of course. I was always impressed that my dad owned something like this:
It seemed so massive, so industrial, so impressive. As I’ve said many times in many venues – I am repeating myself, because there are only so many memories from which one can draw inspiration, and beyond that it’s fabrication – I remember the sound of the sign creaking in the wind, the whine of the highway singing along. It was quiet out there. The hum of the highway, the trickle of KQWB from the service bays, the occasional Ding-Ding of a car rolling over the annunciating snake, but quiet.

The sign back then, ankle-deep in the ’69 flood:
It’s not quiet anymore. Houses. Businesses. A new store next door selling recreational vehicles. A new gas station down the road, too, the long-feared NEMESIS. For years there were rumors someone would open up a station close by; it used to make me nervous as a kid. Why would someone do that? What would it mean for us? One fellow developed a grudge against my father and vowed he’d build one across the street and give my dad a heart attack. Didn’t happen. Well, eventually someone tried to build another one down the street, but ran out of money halfway through. Someone else finished it, and it’s up and open. We drove past. Nice place, but it seems to lack any way to get in, or out. Fargo has more than its share of stations that lack discernible ingress and egress routes; it’s a curse. Most of the commercial developments either have frontage roads or design rules that forbid the easy-in-easy-out pattern of the average urban corner gas station.

It’s nothing new – I recall a gas station that went bust on the intersection of I-29 and Main. It takes some doing to go bust selling gas at the crossroads of an interstate and Main, but he managed; traffic patterns were the reason. People just couldn’t find a way to get to the damned place. The station – a Texaco – was razed long ago, but I still note its passing when I drive past.

What’s this – someone’s tunneling from the warehouse to the convenience store?
No. The answer to “what’s this” is several thousand dollars. Government mandate. What would happen if all the barrels in the warehouse sprung a leak, and the tanks were punctured? The oil would get everywhere. So they require a berm. Never be used. Money gone forever.

Here's inside the main warehouse of the Lileks Oil Empire:
And another, showing one of the transports. Isn’t this exciting? I promised Dad I’d put it up. Happy to oblige.

Random equipment: I like this shot.
Gasboy!
From the company history:

Started by a previously indentured servant, James Wilson, way back in 1819, a trained painter and glazier, founded William M. Wilson's Sons on old Philadelphia's “Merchant's Row.” For a century, this small company, named in honor of the founder's father, specialized in painting, glazing, and wholesale distributing.

190 years old: ye gads.

83 years old: Gasman.

One more picture. Dad always wants me to post the trucks. He's proud, justly proud, of his fleet. There's not one of them he couldn't start up and parallel park. So we'll end with this one:
The rainwater would have drained away, but, well, the berm. The Mandatory Berm. Perfec breeding ground. As I took this picture, I was hit by a skeeter.

**Next:** back to school one. Also, the start of the Highway Ten series at the stribblog – and this time I’ll get the )$%*(#$% url correct. I don’t know why I’m having so much trouble with the most elementary things.

Hey, did you know Mars will be extra large this month? I don’t have the heart to tell him. But I will. It’s called filial duty.
70 RESPONSES TO *thursday, as promised*

**ech** says:
August 13, 2009 at 3:20 pm

Get your Dad's stories.

My dad wouldn't talk about his service in WWII except in small fragments. He was on the USS Comfort, a Navy hospital ship in the Pacific. He said about two things to me:
- It was a lot like the movie *MASH* – including a surgeon going nuts while doing an appendectomy. My dad, all of 18, finished the procedure, which he knew how to do – his dad was an MD who roomed in med school with the surgeon that invented the modern appendectomy. When he went to see the movie of *MASH*, he went with his brother, an Army Air Corps crash team medic in the UK, and my mom said the two of them laughed so hard it was embarrassing.
- “It was awful. We'd go in right after an invasion to help the casualties. The burns were the worst.” Then he changed the subject.

He never talked about it with Mom. The only person he talked to, other than his brother, was my daughter. She had a class assignment to talk to someone who had been in a war. They talked alone for about 20 minutes. Megan said she stopped talking to him because he couldn't go on. He told her about how several of his friends were killed by a kamikaze (April, 1945 off Okinawa according to Wikipedia – 28 dead, including 6 nurses). After the war, he was assigned to a naval hospital in Georgia. One night, two black orderlies – in uniform – went to the wrong part of town and were lynched. This may explain why he was one of the first podiatrists to fully integrate his practice in the 60s.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
August 13, 2009 at 3:48 pm

@ech

My Dad was a Marine Rifleman at Okinawa – I'll extend my thanks to your Dad for taking care of my Dad's buddies.

**Tom in Denver** says:
August 13, 2009 at 4:05 pm

I too am the child of a WW2 serviceman. All my 7 uncles were also in the war. My eyes water up a little everytime I read the stories of these people who sacrificed so much. My generation (baby boomer) generally showed little respect towards the people who won WW2 (or vets from the Viet Nam era for that matter) when we were younger, and for that I am sorry. We will be remembering Woodstock this week, but I would prefer to remember my dad.
juanito - John Davey says:
August 13, 2009 at 4:43 pm

@Tom in Denver
I know what you mean. My Dad's family had 10 kids. The youngest brother was too young to see combat in WWII, but served in the Japan Occupation Forces. He passed away a year after my Dad. He and his brothers all are interned at a very small (and very old) cemetery in Sonora CA. All with simple granite markers, listing Branch of Service. When I visit and look at all those brothers laying side by side, it's heartbreaking and comforting all at the same time.

lanczos says:
August 13, 2009 at 5:31 pm

@NavySeabee
The Commemorative Air Force (www.commemorativeairforce.org) has an oral history project for all vets. Hope that some of the stories will appear online there soon. Also, many state libraries are interested in WWII reminiscences.

My dad: 339th Fighter Squadron on Guadalcanal, and then up the Solomons (after the squadron knocked off Yamamoto.) Almost starved to death when supplies were cut off – came home weighing 92 pounds. Thank God he wrote down his memoirs before he passed away in 2003. God Bless all those guys – there are fewer of them every day.

Kitty says:
August 13, 2009 at 6:39 pm

The WWII generation was one to give inspiration. I recently read a biography of Curtis Lemay that really opened my eyes on the fact that he did what had to be done to keep our country's casualties down and never complained about it. It was no sure thing that we would defeat Japan and Germany.

Lars Walker says:
August 13, 2009 at 6:41 pm

I envy you still having your dad around, James. It's something to treasure. Obviously you know that.

I've often wondered about the Tesoro brand. I first saw it a few years back, when I took a vacation in Newfoundland. "Must be a Canadian thing," I thought. But now they're moving in south of the line.

I blame the Illuminati.

Steelkilt says:
August 13, 2009 at 7:08 pm

I noticed three things about this post. One, our fathers are better men than we are. My dad, also a WWII Navy vet, has the same reticence as Mr. Lileks, the same quiet dignity about what he and his generation accomplished. What we will be when they are gone?

Two, look at how clean the floors of the shop and warehouse are. Those floors are swept every day, because that's just what you do. Has anyone else noticed that most public or work spaces have
become more dirty over the past few years? Go into any public washroom, or waiting area, and things are just grungy. What happened? Nobody sweeps the floor anymore. Why not?

Three, I cannot believe how flat Fargo is. I live in Buffalo, and we're the Alps compared to North Dakota. How can you people live there? You can see the horizon in all directions!

Lisa P says:
August 13, 2009 at 7:19 pm

@JohnW
Am I the only one who thought, for a split second, that this was the solution? Seriously, nobody else?

Lisa P says:
August 13, 2009 at 7:24 pm

@Lisa P
This is what I was commenting about: “The rainwater would have drained away, but, well, the berm. The Mandatory Berm. Perfect breeding ground. As I took this picture, I was bit by a skeeter.

He should put some drain holes in to keep the water from pooling.”

James, I hate to have to school you on teh internets, but your comment replies should include the original comment so people don’t look like random morons. Just sayin’.

Love, Random Moron who thinks you're awesome

cnyguy says:
August 13, 2009 at 7:28 pm

Annunciating snake?? I always wondered what to call those things. “The hose the car runs over by the gas pumps that makes the bell inside the garage ring” is a bit cumbersome.

The elder Mr. Lileks looks hale and hearty, and the pride he takes in his business is certainly justified.

And belated birthday greetings to Our Host.

Lisa P says:
August 13, 2009 at 7:31 pm

Now that you have been properly schooled, I would like to tell you how much I appreciate reading about how much you admire your dad. He is clearly deserving of admiration. Please thank him for his service for me.

My own dad was a veteran of Korea and Viet Nam. He never talked about his experiences, but he was an intel officer, so that wasn’t surprising. He passed away a year ago last September. I am glad to see that you take every opportunity to appreciate your dad. I almost missed that. Thankfully, my dad chose to hang around a year and a half longer than the docs predicted, and I made the most of it.

Mikey NTH says:
August 13, 2009 at 7:45 pm

I wish I could have gotten my grandfather’s stories (RFC during the
Great War), but he was a pretty taciturn man.

We're trying to get mom and dad's stories down, and I even gave them a dictaphone recorder (just tell us stories, about your selves, the people you knew, etc.) We'll see about that.

Now, here is a story. My mom was taking piano lessons at about age 8-9. She wrote a manifesto to her mom, in crayon (the manifesto still exists – grandma saved it). The gist was that mom was telling her mom to let 'old lady Edgar' know that she wasn't taking lessons anymore.

With the manifesto was a program for a piano recital in 1940 where Ann Martindale was playing 'March of the Toy Soldiers'. The rebellion was crushed.

Retread says:
August 13, 2009 at 8:09 pm

You are lucky in your dad. But clearly you already know that. Thanks for stories about him.

My dad passed away 13 years ago and I still miss him, so I like hearing stories about other dads.

TexasJew says:
August 13, 2009 at 10:09 pm

Jim,
There was a Tea Party in Fargo today and there is a lot of push back to Dorgan and those clowns.

TexasJew says:
August 13, 2009 at 10:46 pm

They had almost 1400-1500 people there in Fargo this evening, btw.

Susan says:
August 13, 2009 at 11:18 pm

Wonderful, thought-provoking post, James. Thank you for giving us a "peep" into what seems to be a great father-son relationship & your childhood memories. Happy (belated) birthday.

Kev says:
August 14, 2009 at 4:01 pm

Annunciating snake?? I always wondered what to call those things.

All the Dave Barry fans on here would agree that Annunciating Snake WBAGNFARB.

Fred says:
August 17, 2009 at 8:21 am

Richard, I did notice however that wink could have been interpreted as, “I'm being silly (because the oil would drain) or “Isn't that clever?”

Emoticons actually do help get the meaning across in writing but sometimes are still open to misinterpretation by those of us too
quick to try to throw nuance into situations where it doesn't belong or too slow to accept the obvious interpretation.

Anne says:
August 20, 2009 at 3:56 pm

Thank you for sharing about your father's involvement in freeing the survivors of the Bataan Death march.

One of my favorite “grown-up” friends in the 70s and 80s was a man who survived the march. Naturally, he said very little about it. He was a dear person in my life and all these years later I still miss him and his loving interest in my brothers and I.

Thank your father from me. He did a great thing for my friend and also for me by freeing those men.
This marks the second installment of the Epic Journey to the Heart of Fargo, a tale with everything but Yul Brynner. When we left off I’d finished breakfast, and visited the station with my father. After I dropped him off I wandered downtown to Atomic Coffee. I’d been there before, and ordered coffee in a cup. Mistake: it was almost seven inches wide, which guaranteed the coffee would be dead cold within a few minutes. This time I chose a paper cup.

Wrote, sipped, watched people walk past. People, walking, in downtown
I'm still surprised by downtown's renaissance. Also somewhat saddened; a few old painted signs are gone, and a particularly carbuncle-like condo perched on top of a parking structure has permanently obscured the view of the coffee shop ghost sign. Just a cup of coffee to you, but a reputation to us. That's almost backwards from the way it is now, eh? People stake their identity, their reputation, on their choice of coffee. Shade grown fair-trade organic in a cup made from 60% recycled post-consumer materials. A reputation to you, but just a cup of coffee to us.

I drove north to my old neighborhood. The Sambo's is gone. Of course, Sambo's have been gone for decades, but this place had a spot in my heart. One of the first restaurants on the north side in my childhood, a place for Sunday French Toast, meeting place for coffee in high school. A counter, vinyl booths that exhaled when you sat down, turquoise galore. It went through many different names, closed, opened, closed again – and now it's been razed, as if they're just tired of trying.

This was the Sambos in its final days:

Not that it matters, but it had a doppelganger on the south side of town. It's still around.
I know, I know – it's only commercial architecture of dubious value; who cares? No one, or at least hardly anyone – which is why the urban landscape loses its landmarks and familiar themes, and everything gets replaced, blandified into faux-historic structures that pretend vernacular modernism never happened.

A few blocks to the west: my old elementary school. McKinley.
I don’t think I’ve been inside since I left sixth grade. Last I heard, one of my favorite teachers was the principal; I had an odd idea I might run into him. The door was open. Inside everything from the rooms was heaped in the hallway: renovations, cleaning, painting, preparations. I checked the office, explained my mission: I’d missed him. By a year. Could I look around, take some pictures?

Sure, said the nice lady. This was Fargo, after all.

Part of the shock of remembering is recognizing all you have forgotten. If I’d been asked to reconstruct grade school memories, I would have never recalled the gold-leaf decals on the doors. But of course. Of course!
BOYS led to the bathroom, the hues of which has the original institutional vitality of post-war boomer bins. Still peachy after all these years:

The glass block windows are gone – insulating issues, said one inspector – but the ceramic tiled walls, the 50s hues, the light wood with the gold-hued decal names on the doors, it's all there. There's much more stuff on the wall, most
of designed to provide rote institutional reinforcement and encouragement to the kids. I don’t know how much it works. I don’t recall any of it in my time.

This would have been my fourth grade room. I knew it right away.

I knew where I’d sat, and I stood there, remembering a picture I drew of the sinking Titanic in a tablet that had spacemen on the cover. (Realistic spacemen in bulbous suits building a space station.) Next to me, over there, would have been the desk of that big clumsy slow girl noted for throwing up inside her desk, hoping no one would notice.

It was all familiar – but I’d forgotten the turquoise-tile backsplash for the water fountain, on the left. The suspended ceilings were new; in the Olden Tymes we had giant metal fluorescent banks suspended from poles. They looked like upside-down ice-cream trays.

At the end of the hall were the kindergarten rooms. Couldn’t get in. Just peered through the glass, looking at the spot where I’d napped 45 years ago, at the bathroom door where the teacher helped me with my zipper and managed to get the equipment caught in the teeth. It’s a wonder I’m not a serial killer.

There should have been a sign: “This door has been permanently locked for symbolic purposes.”

I crouched down, and there it was, the view I had on my first day in school:
Minus the carpet, that is. We had no carpet. Why, we had crushed glass studded with tacks and viper's teeth, by cracky.

Stopped by the GYM, always a source of anxiety and failure. It was dim and ominous, as ever:
I don't know what I expected to find when I walked in – as I said, you don't know what you forget until you remember. But the original teacher's desks, from the Space Age of Educational Furnishings?

I found the people who'd seen me come in, told them I was going – see? No computer parts under my shirt – and thanked them for letting me take a private tour. On the way out I paused again, because this view -
- had meaning. On the right was where I was beat up by a kid on crutches, of all things. He cracked me hard on the shin, knocked me down. It must have been that spot, because I still recall the reveries where I inflicted revenge, earning the awe and respect of all. They took place right here. It would have been great if he’d been the janitor, and we’d stood there having a laugh, and I’d kicked him in the leg. Fair enough, he’d have to say, grimacing, down on one knee, catching his breath.

I got in my car, called directory assistance, and called what I hoped was my old 5th grade teacher, Mr. Kahl. He wasn’t in. I left a message telling him I’d been at the school, how I’d always remembered his joy and enthusiasm, and never forgot him. Thanked him, pressed END CALL and drove away. I’ll never have to go there again.

After the school it was time to revisit something I’d seen a few years ago: the abandoned McDonald’s. Yes, a McDonald’s closed in North Fargo. There aren’t many fast-food options, except for another McDonald’s. Apparently the town wasn’t big enough for the two of them. This was what it looked like three years ago:
And now:

Much more overgrown. Nearly all the plants are ugly. They're nasty, too – they sting, they stick, they make your skin tingle if you rub up against them. It's like a garden from a Stephen King novel, because it's all off, somehow, wrong in a way you grasp straight away. The bad juju screams from this place, and you can't help but wonder if the inside is dead cold, the walls smeared with word that would be innocuous in another context but
frightening here. Surely something bad happened here, and that's why it
closed. I mean, look at this place. Tell me there's not something wrong here.

The drive-thru. Thank you, please DIE ahead.
That was pretty much the trip; I drove around, took pictures, went back to my dad's place. Had dinner with sister & her family (her husband runs the family business now; learned on the job, grew the business and bought it a long lease in the 21st century.) We sat outside on a restaurant's patio, alongside a new road by a new development – Fargo grows so fast Google Earth can't keep up – and toasted sunset in the new world. Dad picked up the check. He always picks up the check; it's the pleasure of being Dad.

The next morning I intended to get up and out, but lo: a puddle of oil on the driveway. Dad said they may have crossthreaded the plug when they changed the oil. Checked the dipstick: down two quarts, but that might have been due to starting the car. Still, better check it out. Went back to the oil change shop, and they explained: yesterday we were out of the stuff we use to clean the oil after a change, and it might have collected in the frame. See? Your dipstick reads full. Well, thanks, guys. Great. Great job. For my troubles I got a free car wash. But I'm leaving town. Good for four months. Why not forever? I wanted to ask.

Called my dad from the road, said it was just a messy job.

“Figures,” he said. “I drive past there all the time and never see anyone in there.” He advised me to check my oil throughout the trip, though. And I did. Pulled over outside of Detroit Lakes to get some coffee. Oil was fine. Went in for coffee. They were out. Oh, they had French Vanilla and Cappuccino and Hazelnut, but no actual coffee coffee. Grr. “You're out of coffee,” I said to the clerk on my way out.

“Thank you,” she said, and to this day I don't know if that was a thank you or another kind of blank-you. I drove on. Pulled over in Verndale to top off the tank; as I pulled up to the pump a guy came out, wiping his hands. I looked at the pump: no credit card. I said I was just looking for a quick fill with a card, and he said “Oh.” I felt bad. Asked if they had any coffee.

“We just ran out,” he said. Good Lord.

Drove on. Outside of Staples I pulled over again, filled up. The speakers were playing “Morning Train” by Sheena Easton; winced, as usual, when she went for that high note. Went inside for coffee: brother, did they have coffee. Bought a go-cup as big as my forearm. Back on the road.

There you have it: three thrilling days. It's been a fine week, and I look forward to getting back to all the usual updates next week, before I take another week off before the delightful hell of the State Fair. New column up at Startribune.com; the Strib blog will have another entry today about the run up Highway Ten.

I leave you with . . . The Bowler. See you later today, with 100 Mysteries.
Orebaugh says:
August 14, 2009 at 11:44 am

Spud: “DOOM” Oy. Tell me about it.

When I started kindergarten in ’69, the elementary school had a “new part” (K, 1, 2, lunchroom) and an “old part” (3, 4, 5, 6, furnace). About 10 years ago they tore down the “old part” and built an addition for the police department. The “new part” (which is now the “old part”) holds the town offices. The high school has been extensively remodeled since I left it in ’79, so I’m not sure what the nostalgia factor would be. Never much liked that place anyway. The private school that (barely) gave me my diploma is in a continual state of demolishing, rebuilding, and renovating. The new stuff is nice, but I miss the old a little. And while visiting my college campus a few years back, I got lost because they’d moved the roads around. Maybe I’ll stay home from now on.

Kim says:
August 14, 2009 at 11:46 am

Wow. I live 1.5 miles away from the building I was born in and can visit four of my elementary schools (the county changed school boundaries every few years) and my high school within 20 minutes.

And it isn’t even a small town – it’s Hayward, California, part of the San Francisco Bay Area!

Every day is nostalgia for me – the old city hall/police department where my dad worked in the early ’60s; four different houses in four ’60s housing tracts, Centennial Hall – the community hall that
was my father’s high school gym.

Bancheros – the Italian restaurant that is celebrating its 60th year; I used to dance on the bar when I was three years old and my grandparents would take me there. You could do that back then. Mr. Gino was the bartender and I’d get Shirley Temples. Old juke box; grandpa would give me dimes to feed it. My dad, my mom, me and my oldest daughter all celebrated our 21st birthdays there.

The names of the stores in the tiles on what used to be downtown.

Aw geeze, I’m going to go hop in the car and take a drive…..

gmann63 says:
August 14, 2009 at 12:00 pm

My elementary school, which I attended from 1969-1973, was torn down sometime in the 80s – it was about a quarter of a mile from my house, but I lived out of town at the time and my sister got all of us kids a brick from the school with a gold plaque attached. It’s a nice memory. I was recently looking at my 1st grade class picture – I think I completed high school with 85% of the kids in the picture.

Tracy Tool says:
August 14, 2009 at 12:33 pm

On my last Fargo visit, the Bowler advised that it discontinued its classic smorgasbord 15 years ago. Through the 60s and 70s, that was good eatin’.

Larry says:
August 14, 2009 at 12:45 pm

Kim Wow I went to Mt Eden my wife went Hayward High and we still live in Hayward

juanito - John Davey says:
August 14, 2009 at 1:06 pm

My original elementary school (Coloma Elementary 4623 T St. Sacramento CA) was closed as I entered the 4th grade (around the time of Prop 13 and all the angst regarding school funding being ripped away by black hearted Republicans – meh..). It wasn’t earthquake safe, and the cost to seismicly retrofit was deemed too high. So Off we went to another school miles away.

It was a grand old building – all brick with a Spanish tile roof. Everything was indoors which to folks outside of California seems like no big deal, but out here, you walk outside to go anywhere. No indoor hallways. Even had a second floor, which the ADA would have killed eventually anyway.

The City of Sacramento ended up buying the building from the school district, and converted it to a community center. We rented the Auditorium for my Wife’s College graduation party in 1994 (A genuine whip-lash-bash, if ever there was!) Not safe enough for school kids, but good enough for City employees. Yeesh.

Here it is from the city website —
http://www.cityofsacramento.org/parksandrecreation/recreation/c_coloma.htm

And of course the obligatory Google Map Street View. —
http://maps.google.com/maps
Fantastic time to ponder the old school, as my youngest just started her first day of Kindergarten yesterday...

Ron says:
August 14, 2009 at 1:34 pm

That school looks hideous. I can't believe they still imprison children in those places. Some day people will look back on that the way we look at medieval medicine.

jamcool says:
August 14, 2009 at 2:31 pm

In my neck of the woods, former McDs (and BKs and J-Boxes) don't die...they just become Mexican restaraunts with names ending with "berto".

Burke A says:
August 14, 2009 at 2:53 pm

All these years of reading and I never knew you had Mr Kahl as a teacher.

Kim says:
August 14, 2009 at 3:03 pm

Larry – holy cow! I went to American High in Fremont – class of ’75! We detoured briefly to Sacramento or I’d have gone to Calaroga Jr. High and Mt. Eden!!!! : D

D Palmer says:
August 14, 2009 at 3:03 pm

Last weekend I was in the small town where I grew up about 40 miles SW of Chicago. I was attending a family reunion for one of my old neighbors. His parents still live in the same house they bought 50+ years ago. Only 2 new houses on the street since I graduated from high school in 1983. Only 3 since I moved their in 1972.

Left the party beifly to walk over to the elementary school that is nearby. I walked the 1/2 mile or so to school every day from 2nd grade until high school when I finally had to take a bus. It was weird, walking the same path I had first trod 37 years earlier. The bones of the school are there, although augmented by additions. I peeked in the windows at my 4th grade classrooms and marveled that some of the playground equipment I played on over 30 years ago is still there.

A few years back I wandered to the school web site. I saw that my 4th grade reading teacher was still there. It was in her class that I first read The Hobbit and the Lion, Witch, and The Wardrobe (we read them out loud as a class). I sent her an email to thank her for fostering what has been a life long love of reading, fantasy novels in particular. It turned out she had just retired. I was so glad that I had sent her the note.
Larry says:
August 14, 2009 at 3:16 pm

Kim
Wow again, I also went to Calaroga Jr I had transfered from Westlake High in Okland

juanito - John Davey says:
August 14, 2009 at 3:54 pm

jamcool :
In my neck of the woods, former McDs (and BKs and J-Boxes) don't die...they just become Mexican restaraunts with names ending with “berto”.

Would they start with Alda? IN Nor Cal?

juanito - John Davey says:
August 14, 2009 at 3:58 pm

Kim :
Larry – holy cow! I went to American High in Fremont – class of ’75! We detoured briefly to Sacramento or I’d have gone to Calaroga Jr. High and Mt. Eden!!!! : D

Grew up in Sacramento – What Middle School / Jr. High did you attend?

My older brother was in the first Graduating Class from the California School for the Deaf in Fremont (prior to that he was at Berkley before it moved to Fremont).

Lilicat says:
August 14, 2009 at 4:02 pm

I did a Nostalgia Tour in 2000. The goal was to visit every place I'd lived and every school I went to. The biggest and saddest shock was finding no trace of the lovely old Hills School where I spent kindergarten and first grade (blessings to Mrs. Zutt and Mrs. Carlen wherever they are) The beautiful old Dutch Colonial building with its slate roof and rolling green campus had been paved over with McMansions. The heck with the fact Hills was the first school in the newly consolidated district, and therefore historic, forget the fact it was architecturally distinct and lovely. All I could find was a berm of earth at the head of what had been the driveway, and the walnut trees that lined what was now a suburban neighborhood cul de sac. All the other flat-roofed cinderblock Bauhaus monstrosities had survived nicely. And I was sad to see the earth hadn't swallowed my junior high – repository of so many hellish memories. Oh, and our first house, the house my father built in Heiligmann's meadow – transformed from modest cedar-shingled rambling rancher to Italian marble-floored palazzo. Sigh.

Kev says:
August 14, 2009 at 4:36 pm

One morning I explained to the manager of a fast food place the importance of not shutting off breakfast orders at 10:20am.
Oh man—that happened to me a few years ago at a Mickey D's while on a roadtrip; the manager shut down breakfast while I was in line (I think I was next). Grrr…

Great nostalgia trip once again, James. I'm really liking this series…

**jamcool** says:
August 14, 2009 at 5:14 pm

@juanito – John Davey

Phoenix…Filiberto's, Edelberto's…etc

**juanito - John Davey** says:
August 14, 2009 at 5:22 pm

@jamcool
Why, then it's decidedly more authentic than Nor Cal.

**Wramblin' Wreck** says:
August 14, 2009 at 5:31 pm

Nostalgia is an everyday experience for me. I live in the house in which I was born and raised. In the basement there is an impression in the concrete of my foot when I was one year old.

When I started school in 1960 I attended a one room schoolhouse. It required a one hour bus ride each way from my house to the school. The county was growing and consolidating all of the little schools into fewer, larger structures to accommodate more student from a wider geographical area. So in first grade we used one room for all grades. The next year we has three classrooms (1st & 2nd, 3rd and 4th, 5th and 6th grades) with the original 'classroom' being used as the lunchroom & gymnasium. Two years later the school grew again to 6 classrooms; one grade per room. That was a big deal for all of the students.

Personally I think I learned more being in a one room school house. I could listen and watch what the older students were learning.

Many years later my daughter went to the same elementary school I attended. However when she was there is had grown considerably. The six classrooms we had were now just the first and second grades. New additions and trailers were used for the older grade classrooms.

When (if) my daughter has kids they will go to the same school as we did. But how will it have changed? An interesting concept.

**bob** says:
August 14, 2009 at 5:49 pm

I grew up in rural N.California a few miles outside of the rather small town of Sebastopol. The elementary school (Gravenstein Union Elementary) I attended has changed very little. One of the memories that I still think about today is of one of the custodians. I can't remember his name but I'll never forget his full head of slicked back, jet black hair and the fact that he always had a .357 magnum holstered too his hip! Who was going to get us out here in the boonies? A rabid Turkey Vulture? Later on someone told me that he was on of the survivors of Pork Chop Hill in the Korean War. Not sure if that was true but it does seem to make sense.
GSC says:
August 15, 2009 at 1:00 am

Any nostalgia for my old schools will have to be from memory or photos. All the schools were razed. My 60s elementary school was built in the classic 50s international/prairie style with multiple separate classroom blocks (4 rooms to a square) linked with exterior sidewalks and mini lawn squares. Very similar to our hosts' pictures inside. It was rumored that the school district bought the plans from a California source. Could have been true, it was intended for a more benign climate than upstate SC. Too hot in the warm months with that glass wall letting in the sun, too cold in the winter with the inadequate heaters next to the glass. You got wet and cold going to lunch if the weather was bad.

The school was finally replaced in the 80's by a much nicer multistory building.

My junior high school was about 50 years old and on its last days. They closed it after our last year and it was demolished a year later. Those plans must have been purchased from New York City. It looked like it would have fit in perfectly among the brownstones. The third floor was condemned and chained off. Not the safest feeling to be under that.

My high school was built in the late 50s on the Florida plans. Concrete block exterior walls with holes in them so you could catch the rain and winter winds in the hallways going from class to class. They finally replaced it about 10 years ago. Some people say it looks like prison architecture but at least the walls are solid.

bgbear says:
August 15, 2009 at 8:59 am

I visited my home town, Santa Maria, CA Friday for an uncle's memorial service.

Many things down town were torn down in the 70s and 80s but, surprisingly, it seems like nothing since then. There are additions and expansions and new buildings but, many buildings approaching 100 and tons of “vernacular modernism” are still present and prosperous.

It is a lot like Fargo but, much warmer.

Kev says:
August 15, 2009 at 12:01 pm

I did a Nostalgia trip of my own about a year and a half ago while on a trip to Chicago. I spent my kindergarten year in the northwest suburb of Mount Prospect, so I made it a point to drive through there while I was in the area. I couldn't visit my old elementary school, Sunset Park, because it had stopped being a school before I was in high school, and the building has since been razed (so Sunset Park is now…a park). But I did get to go through my old neighborhood, and I was very pleased to see that everything--the neighborhood, and Mount Prospect in general--was very well-kept. I got to take some pictures of our old house to show to my folks, and the snow on the roof was a nice bonus.

The one thing I wish I had done when I was there was take a walk through Randhurst Mall, designed by Victor Gruen (a familiar name to Twin Citians) in the unique shape of an equilateral triangle with
anchors at each point. Sadly, a few months after I was there, it was announced that the mall would be closed, the triangle section razed, and the whole thing would be reborn as a New Urbanist “town center.” (While I'm usually a fan of those, I wish there had been a way to save this architectural marvel.) Randhurst's last day of business in its original form was Sept. 30 of last year.

Kim says:
August 16, 2009 at 8:31 am

@juanito – John Davey

When I was in Sacramento, I attended Charles Mack Elementary for half a year and then James Rutter Jr. High for 7th 8th and 9th. : )

juanito - John Davey says:
August 16, 2009 at 11:15 pm

@Kim
For me it was Coloma, Phoebe Hearst, & Riverside for elementary, Kit Carson for Middle school, and finally Christian Brothers High School.

John Frost says:
August 18, 2009 at 1:51 pm

I have just discovered that the place I knew as Sambos in Lincoln City, Oregon was never part of the national chain (despite having the same look and feel and even characters as the National chain).

http://www.lilsambos.com/aboutus.html

Nevertheless, if you're nostalgic for Sambo's you can get some in Oregon

blivet says:
August 18, 2009 at 11:26 pm

“They looked like upside-down ice-cream trays.” I think you meant ice cube trays, but thank you very much for reminding me of this. I thought the same thing when I was in elementary school.
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?
Indulge me a bit more Fargo; this is the last entry. I've spent the weekend going through stuff, and my head is marinated in family history. So. Called Dad tonight; asked him about this.
More about that in a bit.

**This is not** a vacation week; next week is another one of those sporadic-update events as I attempt to enjoy the waning glory of a lackluster summer. Saturday night I edited most of the summer footage into the obligatory family movie, and was surprised to note that it didn’t feel as if it had sped by in the twitch of a skeeter’s leg. Then I went downstairs to watch “Cleopatra,” which I bought on DVD years ago for reasons that completely escaped me from the moment the box arrived from Amazon. I like to stay up late, but there’s something about standing in the kitchen at 1 AM looking at a box that says “Length: 248 minutes” that gives one pause. I enjoyed Rex Harrison as Caesar, though. *The walls that fall / are mainly of the Gauls.* Elizabeth Taylor is bad, but I’ve never liked her. The movie is interminable – I’m trying to finish it now – but for God’s sake, the Roman Empire itself concluded with greater alacrity.

**Speaking of iconic hotties** and lesser manifestations of the genre: while doing some other things on the computer I watched “Beyond the Poseidon Adventure” on the auxiliary screen. Great cast, utter dreck. Here comes Slim Pickens as a colorful Texan, li’l lady! Here comes Sally Fields in full Nervous Perky Spunk Mode! Michael Caine, trying to shout over the sound of him cashing a paycheck! Telly Savalas, sleek and malevolent, dressed to investigate a doomed upended passenger liner in a white suit! I was ashamed to note that I didn’t immediately recognize this actress:

So that was my weekend entertainment, aside from “Mad Men,” which I haven’t watched yet. I hope this is the last season. Can’t bear to think of everyone at Sterling Cooper wearing big sideburns and yellow seersucker plaid suits.

I hate to say I spent the weekend scanning, but I did. The final leg of the great archiving is underway; the things people have sent me over the last five years are finally being fed into the scanner. Items are being set aside to be released back into the wild via the antique store. Speaking of which: Friday I went there with Natalie, and the owner noted she’d just bought another matchbook collection. Would I like to see it? My yes. It’s all from Sheboygan in the early 40s, but it doesn’t have the same vibe as the Joe Ohio collection from Cleveland. It’s all bars. Lots of V-for-Victory stuff. You get the feel of someone in his 40s, single, saving matchbooks to tell some tale no one else could reconstruct. Well, that’s the 2010 site; you’ll see.

To give you an idea as to the overwhelming scope of the Great Archiving: I decided Sunday morn to scan a photo album of my Mom’s. It’s a late-teen project. At some point my Mom gave up on photo albums, and I understand why: the chore of sorting, annotating, finding the glassine envelope with the gummed black corner pieces – it just became too much.

Eventually my folks moved to slides, like everyone else; on weekends when Company came over, they’d get out the screen, a shimmery sparkly square that seemed to me like some strange liquid fabric, and they’d bore everyone dead, perhaps. Honestly, all the picture are just people standing there in the backyard. You might as well pass around a mirror. The slides seemed to fall off around ‘62; my dad returned to prints, larger, glossy, with the date stamped on the margin. Then came the Instamatic Age, and lo, the snaps did flow anew. But what to do with them? Storage paradigms came and went. (Sound familiar?) Towards the middle of the 70s my Mom was done with books. The pictures were in the drawer in the living room. I was using photobooks with heavy adhesive pages – no glue required! Just put them on, press down, and curse yourself years later when you try to get them off.

I came back from Fargo with more *$(%$# pictures to scan and sort, because I really need another project that revolves around scanning and sorting. I was happy to find this batch – pictures from the station my dad had stuffed in
a drawer and forgot, mostly of the various floods. Having finished that, and
decided that it was a cool cloudy day out just right for a three-hour project, I
tackled my Mom's high-school photo book. Life on the farm. Or rather people
in Sunday Best standing around the farm at a distance of 45 yards from the
camera. Instead of scanning the pages, I removed them all, scanned in
batches of ten, then made individual photos from the batch, which was
named with the date and location. What was I thinking? This: once the
photos were tagged, the big heavy crumbling book could be tossed. The
individual photos could be put in marked bags. This, somehow, assures
they'll survive.

One of the things that always haunts me about antique store are the bushels
of loose unnamed snapshots; it feels as if everyone in the picture is lost and
forgotten. Not necessarily – if my experience is any guide, people tend to
discard pictures of your parent's friends or out-of-town relations. You assume
they have someone in their corner already, a descendant who's kept them
from tumbling into the black abyss. If you reduce the size of the burden, your
descendants are less likely to toss them.

My mom's scrapbook goes from the last year of high school to college, with
some charming pictures of bobby soxer friends, the farm dogs, a few shots of
Grandpa and Grandma, dad on leave, and some photos dad sent back from
the war. There was enough of the old farm left when I was a kid so it looks
familiar.

Grandfather and Mom, Easter 1948, the farm house. I love this one, if only
because it's the moment after the pose, after the shutter was snapped.
Grandpa, serene in repose; Mom a bit bored.
As for that car at the top: I called Dad tonight, asked him if he remembered a car he bought as a wreck. Not that he'd drive such a thing. He'd have it fixed:

Oh, he remembered it. I said I thought it was a Chevy, but he thought it was a
Hudson.

For a cheerful guy, he's in full Lee Harvey O-mode in many of these pictures, but that's how he posed. From 1950:

Which brings us to the Bulkplant Shotgun Ambush. But that's for later this week.

55 RESPONSES TO *Monday, Aug. 17*

**Mr_Fastbucks** says:
August 18, 2009 at 1:42 am

Photo storage. Century Photo Products. Used to be called 20th century photo. Really got bit by the millennium bug. Had to change the company name. Still in business. Most of my photos and negatives are neatly stored in their archival photo pages. At least until I take them out and ship everything to scancafe.com. Then I don't care what happens to them.

**Chris** says:
August 18, 2009 at 1:46 am

Re: Season three Mad Men premiere... When Don was in the kitchen heating up the milk for his nitwit wife, he was having a series of “flashbacks” of events that predate, and lead up to, his own birth. I'm not sure how he could be remembering these events, since he hadn't been born yet, but anyway... The people shown were his stepmother and stepfather (or possibly his “uncle”), then his biological mother, whom we learn in season two was a prostitute; these scenes seem to confirm that.

Both Don and Pete now have typewriters in their offices. I'm guessing that we're probably in early 1963 now. How long until Sterling/Cooper buys their first mainframe, and we get to see a CRT terminal on someone's desk? Or a touch-tone telephone, fax machine, or electronic calculator? All of these things were just around the corner in the early 60's.

**Chris** says:
August 18, 2009 at 1:54 am

Also, Veronica Hamel, last seen playing Jack's mother on “Lost”. I recall watching that Poseidon sequel back when I was a kid, it really was horrible. Yes, Telly shows up for a marine rescue operation dressed in a suit...right..

**Jim** says:
August 18, 2009 at 7:21 am

damn, Pops had some guns now didn't he? Or should I say “has some guns”, still riding a Harley in his 80's!!

**zefal** says:
August 19, 2009 at 4:10 am

*shesnailie* :
_@_v – under my name is a link to one of the most awesome personal photo archives ever posted to flickr called ‘mom’s world’... you will want to feed me a cucumber slice or two after visiting...

That was very interesting. Thanks!
Ordinary day, mild for an ordinary August. But not this one. Sitting outside in the gazebo, listening to the crickets, the stopwatch of twilight, fall in and out of sync. The utter lack of inspiration continues unabated, but I'm not worried; if I'm not going to go to Cape Cod and sit on an Adirondack chair and stare at the surf, might as well sit in the backyard and blog about inessentials and trivialities.
Today's primary accomplishment so far: cleaning out the kitchen cupboard that holds the plastic containers.

Really. Over the years disorder asserts itself with frightening glee; what was once devoted solely to a particular style of container becomes a mishmash of brand and lid-style paradigms. My wife doesn’t help matters – she saves plastic containers, which is one of those things I . . . don’t. My mother did it. Saved plastic Sue-Bee Honey containers. Oh, they were fine examples of the container genre, thick and durable with a variety of mid-60s hues, suitable for stamps and rubber bands and other bits of domestic flotsam, but they rate of usage exceeded the rate of accumulation by a factor of five, so there was always a tottering column of the damned things in the cupboard, accompanied by a slippery stack of lids. Since most of the uses did not require lids, the number of lids exceeded the number of containers, but you couldn’t throw any of those away. At any time the Depression might return and we’d have to throw everything into small plastic bowls and set out for California on the old truck, you know.

I jest, somewhat, and I’m glad she saved them. I have the lids somewhere. I kept them for the graphics. The containers I threw away.

Anyway: you know how you end up with 25 different shapes and sizes, and 37 different lids. Drives me nuts. The other day at Target I saw a box of containers with a new lid design. You’d never lose a lid again. You’d never be unable to find them. Behold: the lid is stored on the bottom of the container. Snaps right in. If there had been an app for the iPhone that lets you slaughter a virtual goat in praise and thanks, I would have fired it up and done it right there. (You draw your finger across the throat of the goat, but quickly; be merciful) I bought the box and looked forward to throwing out everything else.

I hadn’t gone through this cupboard in a while. It had some sippy cups – brush away a tear, toss ’em out – and a strange bacon cooker we’d used a few times before the bacon actually melted the plastic, imparting an unusual and not altogether salutary flavor. Some home-made popsicle molds, purchased by my wife in a moment of nostalgia for her own childhood – she loved making her own popsicles, she said. But Natalie has never been one for popsicles, suspecting there are many other quiescently frozen confections available that provide more oomph. I can take them or leave them myself. Except for banana. But I’d dump a banana popsicle if they were handing out Dreamsicles; those were rare treats, the childhood equivalent of single-malt scotch. They combined a Push-Up with ice cream. O the marvels of the jet age!
The popsicle molds had a metal rim, which was rusted. Out.

Found a box of corn-cob skewers. I’m always surprised no one ever commits a crime using corn skewers. They’re damned nasty things, and you never use them without fearing you’re going to shoot one straight through your thumb. Make a great close-combat weapon.

There seems to be a rule that corn-cob skewers look like corn cobs, which is at it should be.

Emptied the cupboard, then got the box from the basement. It was then I realized that this new, perfect world of lids and cups forever joined might have a flaw:

_I couldn’t stack them._ They’d have to be placed in the cupboard in rows. All of a sudden this made no sense at all.

Well. I got them out, washed them all, attempt to affix the lids – and discovered that they didn’t snap to the bottom. I hadn’t bought that kind. Somehow I’d bought another kind with oldthink lids. No! I knew the box said something about lids. It made a point of rethinking the lid issue. Sure enough, it had Nev-R-Lose lids or something like that, or E-Z-Stak lids. The lids nestled together, and there were only three sizes. They fit multiple containers. I arranged everything in the cupboard, and it looked nice and neat. Showed my wife when she came home from a hard day of lawyering.

“Very nice,” she said.

“Just don’t use them,” I said.

Later, upon examination of the items, I find that the lids do indeed lock into the base of the containers.

So it’s just win-win all around.
Later today: oh, I don’t know. This is a lazy week. A Comic Sins update, yes, and the Stribblog once or twice. I tend to update around noon. In the late afternoon: Black and White World, the last of the seasonal sci-fi additions.

Summer is when I watch old b&w drive-in-style films in an attempt to capture some sort of bygone hot Chevy night vibe, but those nights never came this year. Usually the slight chill at midnight makes you sigh, realize summer’s gathering up its things and heading over the curve at the end of the world, but this year was different. Summer never turned its face to us for more than a moment.

58 RESPONSES TO tuesday, august 18

Johnston says:
August 18, 2009 at 6:14 pm

We had corn skewers when I was a kid. One night one dislodged as my brother took a bite. Drove the thing right through his cheek! After that, we did not have corn skewers!

bgates says:
August 18, 2009 at 10:33 pm

Juanito – John Davey:

GardenStater:
Christmas work parties are... tense.

Do they really call them “Christmas work parties”? I would have expected “Winter Solstice (the Real Holiday that the Xitianists Coopted) parties”.

bgates says:
August 18, 2009 at 10:35 pm

SeanF:
You all do realize that the “lid attaches to the bottom” feature is supposed to prevent the lid from getting misplaced while the container is being *used* and not while it’s being *stored* (empty or full), right?

Even more embarrassing, look who else doesn’t know how to use those things right.

margaret says:
August 18, 2009 at 11:12 pm

I just saw in the store Tupperwares that collapse AND hold on to their lids.
Patrick says:
August 19, 2009 at 7:28 am

Neil: We're switching to Ball jars--when you lose the lid, hey presto! You buy new lids!  
(And I just found out that our fancy-dancy new vacuum-packer gizmo has an attachment to vacuum-seal mason jars.)

My parents had that same attachment for their vacuum-sealer, and they weren't too satisfied with it. Nothing beats home canning when it comes to putting up an entire garden of veggies. My mom has taken up home canning recently, ever since she started her garden up a couple years ago. I had a pressure canner that had sat around for a few years unused, so she took it and began reading about how to can various veggies. She's put up many pints and quarts of tomato sauce, green beans, and corn.

The best part of home canning is when you use the sealing lids once, that's it. Once you remove them from the jar, you have to throw them away. As for the screwbands, you can just place them directly on the jars after you've washed everything. Everything is dishwasher safe, and nothing gets stained like plastic tends to do, especially when it comes to tomato-based foodstuffs. Also, the jars will keep in any environment for a long period of time.

Of course, mixed foods like soup with all sorts of veggies and meat don't do well when canned. Pasta and grains are just an invitation to pure fail.

marn says:
August 20, 2009 at 1:16 pm

@Scott

The problem with storing the lids on TOP of the containers (in their sealed positions) comes in if your containers are not perfectly, completely dry when you store them...mildew!!! I have yet to empty the dishwasher and find any plastic container without at least one drop of water hiding in the seal. So far, I like the Gladware with interlocking lids the best: I can keep the lids snapped together (OK even if not fully dry) and the bottoms stacked together. I have banned all “Polish Tupperware” (my fam's term for it) to the recycling bin.

Patrick says:
August 21, 2009 at 12:04 pm

lanczos: Ahhh, DREAMSICLES! When I just can't stand it any more, I get some Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla ice cream (PUHLEEZE – give the cheap ice cream to the kids – they don’t know any better) and some Orange Soda. Spoon ice cream into a LARGE glass until it is 3/4 full and then fill with soda. Nothing Better On Planet earth.

There is a restaurant based in Atlanta, with a couple of other locations only within 20 or 30 miles of the primary location called The Varsity that sells a concoction like that. Except they blend the two ingredients together, and they call it a “Frosted Orange”, or when you order it, you call it an “F.O.” Order a couple of c-(hili) dogs
“all the way” (a.k.a. with onions) and an order of (onion) rings, chase it down with the F.O. and then drive yourself over to Grady Memorial Hospital to be treated for the heart attack and brain freeze forthcoming.

**Greg VA says:**
August 22, 2009 at 11:27 pm

Talk about finding things that never got tossed, but should have… how ‘bout double “d” batteries from 1947? my latest post: http://videomartyr.blogspot.com/

I can’t believe no one has said this, but who would like to join me in a class-action suit against Glad and all the others for constantly changing the design of their containers *just slightly* enough to render the last series of their containers incompatible with the latest? We use the top level of our carousel corner cabinet (who invented those gems?!) for Supperware City and the parade of mismatched pairs never ends! But wait! My wife shows up with another set of new Glad containers for the next left-over session (she makes left-overs consistently taste as good, if not better, that the original meal) and what do you know…they’ve gone back to round containers after selling us on square (before that, it was rectangular)! And, of course, this series of round containers has some meaningless improvement that renders it tower-of-babel incompatible with the last series of round containers. Poor round-headed orphan covers, you’ll be abandoned forever. God bless single stream recycling!
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?
Reader's Digest has declared Chapter 11 – or, as the final documents read after their editors finished with them, Chapter 5. I once wrote that Reader’s Digest contained the first practical application of Nanotechnology – no matter where you put the magazine, tiny mites embedded in the cover would pick it up and move it to the top of the toilet tank.

I have an issue from 1941. Take a look at the topic list.
There's an article about the problems of Hollywood, stemming from the pernicious influence of . . . the DOUBLE FEATURE.

“Nobody in Hollywood wants them. Theater owners unanimously oppose them, Women's clubs, parents, teachers, decry them Your neighbor hates them. So do you. Then who likes them? The juvenile public that wants two-lollipops-for-the-price-of-one. And ages 13 to 21 go to movies more than once a week.”

The article notes that most of what Hollywood pumps out is empty saccharine drivel, and the economies of the business – the contract system, chain consolidation – are ruining is ability to make money. Even worse is the pernicious effect of the blockbuster: “Gone With the Wind” spoiled audiences, and convinced execs to greenlight big expensive productions, but there aren't enough stories that deserve the treatment. The industry is in a PANIC not seen since talkies upended the rules.

Also from the more-things-change dept., there's this:
Downright Agnewesque in its alliteration, that. The fellow who argues that newspapers are abandoning their historic role by failing to support the fellow who eventually wins – a rather curious idea of journalistic responsibility – notes that 50 papers go out of business every year, because they’re biased! He compares them to radio, bound by law to report things straight. Similar to today, except now the supplanting medium is praised for admitting its biases.

I’d like to get full context on the Ickes quote – if it’s accurate, it’s quite remarkable that a government official would upbraid the press for not endorsing the guy who won. No? Right?

The list of topics on the ‘41 cover is insufficiently diverse by modern standards, but you sense that the culture has a core, a dense center. Which it did. The modern RD website has a list of contemporary topics, and it’s the usual green-flecked gruel ladled out in on-the-go portion sizes. **Grill healthy!**

**Travel deals! Cut your home costs! Lose 10 pounds for good! Vegetarian Recipes! Advice from experts, like Elizabeth Edwards and Bob Newhart!**

The only thing the magazine seems to be digesting is the bolus of middle-class anxiety. **I could be grilling healthier chicken! I could be asking my contractor one of the ten questions they don’t like! I could be saving big money on a cruise to Aruba!**

You can find the same subjects in any modern newspaper or glossy women’s rag, written in the same perky tone, aimed right at the 30-something mom who sorta thinks Kate is a bitch but you know, that hairstyle does work for her. People for whom free-floating anxiety over inconsequential matters is a hobby, a habit, a proof of virtue. I had no idea the magazine had turned into that.

Reader’s Digest was a staple in our house, because Grandma gave it to us every year as a Christmas gift. Until I learned that it was required to make fun of it, I enjoyed every issue. Quizzed myself on the vocabulary test (**It pays to increase your word power!** Peter Funk was the author, I believe; the name was amusing then, and sounds like a BEFORE part of a Viagra ad now), learned to appreciate the difference at an early age between “Life in These United States” and “Laughter is the Best Medicine.” (Non fiction vs. jokes.) As a hypochondriac from an early age, I avoided “I Am Joe’s Duodenum” or “I
Am Joe’s Throbbing Mass of Inevitably Non-Functioning Gristle,” and I never read the Condensed Books. By the time I came along they were mostly expanded articles, running under the “Drama in Real Life(TM)” banner, I think. We had some Condensed Books, which seemed wrong on every possible level, like compressed ice-cream or Star Trek shortened for extra commercials. What would you take out of a book to condense it? Did they just pick characters and subplots and tease them out of the story like a colored thread in a loosely-knit yarn scarf?

One of the things I didn’t like was the cover art – or rather the back cover art; Reader’s Digest may have been the last magazine to put table of contents on its cover. (That was the standard for Serious Journals in the teens and 20s.) The back was usually banal sub-Rockwell, and I say that as someone who likes Norman Rockwell; as a commercial illustrator, he was peerless, and many people's objections to his work have to do with the pieties they imagine he wanted to force-feed everyone. His sin was finding the beauty in mainstream culture, and casting a calm cool approving gaze over the ordinary things ordinary people did. But the RD back covers had cluttered busy ersatz Americana more suitable for a gas-station giveaway calendar, and you forget the moment you see it.

As the years went on I read it less and less, but I don’t think a month ever passed without everyone in the house reading every single joke, including the ones at the end of every story.

Grandma died, and the magazine stopped coming.

The only other magazine I recall in the house was VFW, which my dad got, and which was full of stuff that made no sense to me. I remember only two things: ads for Sans-a-Belt slacks, and a retail section called “Shop with the Old Sarge,” featuring a drawing of, well, the Old Sarge. Dull stuff. But my grandparents subscribed to Life, and I loved looking through those when we went to the Farm. Must have been a long-standing habit: When going through my Mom’s photo album, I found a picture of Grandma holding a sheaf of big mags complete with Coke ad on the back page:
The mags were *big* in those days. Life was heavy. By the time I came along Life — and it's RC Cola / Hunt's Catsup equivalent, Look — were stripped down for the 60s, with the stark modern look that hasn't aged well. An issue of Life from 1966 is a cold thing compared to its 40s and 50s forebearers. When I discovered those magazines at the public library, the world changed. They may have spoiled me — didn't start reading magazines on my own until college, when I fell in love with *The New Republic*. Read it for a year, submitted a piece, and got it accepted: I’m off! I thought. And so it begins!

It didn't, but it was nice to dream for a while.

**A mild and peaceful day:** uninspired, as they have been. No wind in the sails, but the current's enough. Husbanding my strength for the State Fair, perhaps — that'll be ten days of joy, with video after video and blog post after blog post, as I try to find *something* new in an event that prides itself on its unvarying character. It almost felt blasphemous to go there in June for the car show — the place was packed as if the real fair was underway, and it somehow undercut the pleasure you feel when you walk through the gates after a year to find Brigadoon intact.
Went to the beach with the kids in the afternoon, but that'll be something for the Strib blog. Later today, here: Out of Context Ad Challenge returns, around 11! And I should bestir myself to post the Black and White World: Sci-Fi addition. Didn't yesterday. As I said, slack sails.

Pass it along, if you wish

---

**68 RESPONSES TO Wednesday, August 19**

*D* says:
August 19, 2009 at 12:44 pm

I, too, enjoyed RD proudly for years. Then it became “uncool” in my tiny world. But I continued to read on the sly (what a rebel, eh). I will always remember it as the magazine of waiting rooms everywhere.

**PersonFromPorlock** says:
August 19, 2009 at 12:52 pm

Hpoulter: I'd like to read Young Mr Lileks' article in TNR (probably thundering against Reagan)....

Somehow, I doubt ‘thundering’. ‘Eructing’, possibly, but even raw talent like Our James's can only go so far in overcoming youth.

**The SHWAMY** says:
August 19, 2009 at 1:00 pm

Nautical references aplenty!
According to Google define (probably the worst dictionary in all of human history): Husbanding = “Handling non cargo related operations of a vessel as instructed by the master, owner or charterer” -or- “conserved; used economically”.
Had to look that one up. Nice work James!

**D Palmer** says:
August 19, 2009 at 1:11 pm

My family had the RD subscription (and a shelf full of Condensed Books) as well as the equally ubiquitous National Geographic.

Growing up I read both faithfully. RD lost it's hold on me in the early 80's. I still pick up an NG now and then.

**Capt_57** says:
August 19, 2009 at 1:53 pm

I used to enjoy Reader's Digest, but it really plunged in (it's usual) quality somewhere between 5 and 10 years ago. The final straw came when they included a joke about the Crucifixion in the “Laughter: Best Medicine” page.

Was the joke that offensive? Not if you heard it from a friend in a bar. But in the pages of Readers Digest? Completely tasteless...
Kev says:
August 19, 2009 at 3:14 pm

I once wrote that Reader's Digest contained the first practical application of Nanotechnology – no matter where you put the magazine, tiny mites embedded in the cover would pick it up and move it to the top of the toilet tank.

I still subscribe to RD. Almost quit a few years ago, when I was about three months behind, until one day, when the thought hit me: This fits really well in the bathroom! Started reading it whenever I was in there, and before too long, I was caught up. I have no idea why I'd never thought of that before…

Mxymaster says:
August 19, 2009 at 3:22 pm

I interviewed there a couple of years ago; didn't get the job. This is what happens when you waste Mxymaster's time! Mwah ah ah!

(And a waste of time it was; I think it was just a mercy interview because I had a friend working there.)

Jimmy H says:
August 19, 2009 at 5:45 pm

About 15 years ago when I would visit my parents house I would always grab the RD and read most everything in it. I haven't paid much attention to the magazine in the last 10 years. I have since seen it on the news rack and what people in this forum are saying about the current RD is no surprise to me. Unfortunately, the era of general interest magazines, as well as general interest everything else is in the past. I used to enjoy the artwork on the back of the Digest as it was a showcase of the work of commercial illustrators of the day. I was disappointed in the early 80’s when they replaced this art with “high brow” fine art. The back of the RD was the last vestige of the golden age of illustration.

Paul says:
August 19, 2009 at 6:36 pm

It is no surprise. It seems like there were three strikes against it: fewer magazines for source material, their prime demographic (apparently from these comments it was grandparents or WW2 vets) aging, and – most obviously – the contempt the editors had for the average reader. I took a peak at one while in the Safeway checkout line and thought that they'd shrunk a clone of the Enquirer and Redbook down to a mini-me size. It simply wasn’t the same magazine at all.

Sad. two of the mainstays of the checkout stand in my youth – RD and TV Guide – are gone. I have the New Fall Shows volumes from most of the 70s to the 90s somewhere in the basement.

Chris says:
August 19, 2009 at 6:57 pm

Jim, I love that photo of your grandparents. It reminds me of a few old photos of my grandparents. Salt of the earth, tough as nails Americans right there.
Defrost Indoors says:
August 19, 2009 at 9:06 pm

Whoever said it had turned into a woman's magazine absolutely nailed it. It's funny, my sister gave RD gift subscriptions to me and our brother (and possibly our other brother) and when we were all together a few weeks ago, brother blushingly informed sis that she needn't renew the sub for him—he just didn't enjoy it all that much. Like a lot of others, I joyfully discovered vast stashes of RD and National Geographic at our house, and that of our aunt and uncle, and read as many as I could. There's just no substance to it anymore: it's turned into what I used to sniffily dismiss as a housewife's mag, all chicken recipes and cancer scares. They still sell volumes of condensed books even though they don't appear in the magazine anymore, and even the books they choose to squish nowadays seem terribly lacking in any sort of substance, or maybe it's just that they haven't yet enjoyed the sort of respectability a lot of books gain with time.

Ed Driscoll » Hazy Shade Of Wintour says:
August 20, 2009 at 3:31 am

[...] Nast, home of Vanity Fair and numerous other magazines, and James Lileks condensed the news of Reader's Digest declaring Chapter 11. ("Or, as the final documents read after their editors finished with them, Chapter 5", [...]

jeff says:
August 20, 2009 at 11:32 am

I read a similar article about RD somewhere else recently. Their point was that the magazine used to be published and edited by real people. Now it seems to be staffed by new yorkers who are putting out their version of what they think middle america is interested in.

Lulu says:
August 21, 2009 at 12:51 pm

What I'm struck by is the fact that people apparently used to actually read and care about things having nothing to do with diets, makeovers, fashion, or celebrities. Did Americans actually used to read about science, religion, and other nations' histories and cultures? I'd have to see it to believe it.

Denis C. says:
August 21, 2009 at 8:53 pm

The death of one “condenser” was announced in the NYT on june 11 2008. “John S. Zinsser Jr., 84, Book Popularizer”

“He believed ardently in the Digest's populist mission of making well-written books with strong stories and interesting characters available to people who might not otherwise be readers,” Stephen Zinsser said of his father. [...] 

Stephen Zinsser [...] recalls sitting beside his father during a Metropolitan Opera performance of Richard Strauss's “Rosenkavalier,” with its talky libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

“I said, ‘You look worried,’ and he said: ‘It's good. But it needs cutting.’ ”
Mike Gebert says:
August 23, 2009 at 12:09 am

What amazes me is looking at the list of magazines they were drawing stuff from. Are there still Kiwanis and Rotary and American Legion magazines, printing things worth reading? What a different universe that was.

Fred says:
August 26, 2009 at 3:28 pm

I remember a big stir a good many years back when the folks at the Reader’s Digest Condensed books division announced that they had a condensed version of the Bible.

Oh what a hornet's nest that stirred up. I was actually kind of interested but the howls of outrage were so loud I don’t think it was ever actually published.

I too have fond memories of the ‘old RD’ but am not surprised to see it going. I recall some predictions along those lines a few years back when the rot was becoming more and more obvious. Too bad, I always had hopes of experiencing some event that would allow me to make a humorous submission to “Humor in Uniform” or “Life in these United States” and get a nice check...

dustbury.com » It's digestible! says:
August 27, 2009 at 12:13 pm

[...] the seam of other magazines' content has become more difficult. Look at the magazine names on that 1941 contents page: American Mercury. Collier's. Liberty. Cosmopolitan. Saturday Review of Literature. Even [...]

← Older Comments

Archives

All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
May 2013
April 2013
March 2013
February 2013
January 2013
December 2012
November 2012
October 2012
September 2012
August 2012

Looking for something?
Use the form below to search the site:

Search

Still not finding what you're looking for?
Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!

Archives

All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
May 2013
April 2013
March 2013
February 2013
January 2013
December 2012
November 2012
October 2012
September 2012
August 2012
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

MORE
Thanks for dropping by!
Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
The sirens went off in the middle of torrential rains. I assumed they’d spotted a funnel cloud in the distant burbs – nowadays every siren goes off if someone sees so much as a White Tornado ad on YouTube.

You know, these:

Sign of the times that the spokesperson disses the “green” cleaner. Anyway: I
turned on the TV to get weather reports, and was jostled to find the funnel was downtown. At the same time I was getting tweets about a venerable record store getting nailed, and all of a sudden the whole “heat-island shield” we’d been taught for years seemed no longer operative.

Switched to the radio when the TV went out, but before it did I saw some pictures I’d seen on a local Twitter’s page. Took about seven minutes to bolt up the hierarchy. Interesting. More interesting: reports coming in on the radio indicated the worst damage was 10 blocks to the north, albeit on the other side of the highway. (Those of us on the West Side view the highway as the Comfort Gulch. What, an entire family murdered by meth-heads? What’s the city coming to? How safe are we – wait, where did it happen? Well, that’s three blocks east, yes, but it’s on the other side of the freeway.) I called the office to see if we had video crews out, left messages, and headed over.

That was the the rest of the day. Shooting, attempting to drive downtown – traffic was fubared on an epic scale, as you might imagine – then editing it all down, cursing my crappy tripod, cursing the shots I didn’t get. Well, it was fast. It’s here.

Some examples of the aftermath:
As I noted above: the three-minute video, assembled in haste, is here. And now to write a column about it. Back ASAP.

50 RESPONSES TO 

Retread says:
August 20, 2009 at 6:05 am

Yikes! Glad to hear nobody was hurt.

From the state of some of those cars it looks like there might be some new takers on the Cash For Clunkers deal.

Fred Pennsylvania says:
August 20, 2009 at 6:21 am

Nicely done. It really gave a good, empathetic feel for what it must be like to have your quiet neighborhood trashed by a random act of nature. Being able to peek up under your yard like a discarded carpet remnant is surreal. Makes me grateful to live where we get few tornadoes ... though there is a hurricane potentially on the way!
beckyj says:
August 20, 2009 at 7:54 am

Good grief! I'm glad to hear nobody was hurt! Even in its hasty form, good video.

shesnailie says:
August 20, 2009 at 8:03 am

@_v – doesn't look all that much worse than when line t-storms took out tree after tree in our little corner of the world...

Jerry Ray says:
August 20, 2009 at 8:31 am

A tornado came through downtown (I mean RIGHT downtown, in the middle of all the big buildings) Atlanta in March 2008. Luckily, I was in Hobart, Tasmania at the time. 😁

By the time I got back into town, things were mostly cleaned up, but it was weird to see skyscrapers and the convention center with windows boarded up, and to see signs in the park downtown warning people about walking in the grass barefoot because of all the broken glass that had flown around.

Here's a photo a guy took that made the rounds last year:

http://beertap.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/atlanta-tornado-pic.jpg

Bob Pence says:
August 20, 2009 at 8:48 am

Hmm, saw the pic first, misread the word “aftermath” as “aftersmash.”

Bonnie. says:
August 20, 2009 at 8:32 am

I'm glad you're okay. So far I've been in a hurricane, a tornado, a blizzard and an earthquake. I'll skip a tsunami, thanks, Lord. The scariest weather of all was a tornado, hands down. Terrifying.

p.s. Okay, it was a, like, 2.0 on the Richter scale earthquake, so I can't really compare. Anyone out there been in a big earthquake and been through a tornado? Which is worse?

juanito - John Davey says:
August 20, 2009 at 8:36 am

The Highway is now the new dividing line. It used to be the tracks, as in the wrong side of.

No injuries in Minneapolis? Property only? Sad as that can be for those impacted, it still beats the alternative.

r bj says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:06 am

Haven't been through a tornado, have been through a category 1 hurricane (basically a big thunderstorm). Blizzards, yup. Just put on some more cocoa. Earthquake: I got woken up one time in Portland,
OR. to a 5.3 about 80 miles away. As it was 5:30 am, I did what any sensible person would do after being woken up at such an early hour — turned over and went back to sleep.

wiredog says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:07 am

I remember a few years back when a tornado hit Salt Lake City. Went right through a downtown convention at lunchtime, when everyone was inside eating. Half an hour earlier or later and dozens would've been killed and injured. Instead no one was hurt.

It just happened that a local TV weatherman, on his day off, was there when it hit and did live reports.

wiredog says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:09 am

Opps. Wikipedia reports one death in that storm. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_Salt_Lake_City_tornado

Suzanne Goldman says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:23 am

I do recall a tornado as a child, Brooklyn born dad out on the back patio watching it (and taking pictures with the old kodak) It came towards the house while mum hollering at him to head down to the cellar. Took off bits of our roof and the Belle Tire store a few miles away was flattened to the ground. They found tires up to ten miles away after. Ice storms taking down city officials, hurricanes and 13 holes in my roof and inches of water in my house. Renovations on that one still on going. Earthquake felt like an amusement park ride without the flashing lights and long waits in line. The absolute worst was a sand storm where red sand whipped in through any crack in the apartment and the howling sound that came along with it. Never got all the sand out of my shoes. Yup, major acts of G-d seem to find me throughout my life. I don't take it too personally.

MikeH says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:36 am

Well living my first 33 years of life in So. California went thru plenty of earthquakes including the 71 Sylmar quake (barely remember it, was only 4 at the time) and the 94 Northridge quake (definetly remember that, only a few miles from the and I thought I was going to be buried alive in my bedroom.

Up here in Maine? Well a few Noreasters, a couple of hurricane watches with no hits and a couple of severe t-storms that did some damage in western Maine (the closest to me was in Appleton about 13 miles away. Otherwise it's a been a bit sedate up here, so far!!

RebeccaH says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:53 am

I've never been afraid of lightning, or heavy rains, and have only experienced one earthquake, which I thought was kind of interesting. But wind scares the bejeebus out of me.
**HunkybobTX** says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:56 am

No Earthquakes, no tornadoes or Tsunamis here. Just one Bad hurricane – Ike, and evacuations for that one as well as Rita in year 5. Hope I don’t have to go through another evacuation or aftermath of one of those anytime soon.

**bgbear (roger h)** says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:59 am

I am in no hurry to see a tornado, Twister was enough.

I missed the possible biggest earthquake of my life (knock wood). One of my wife's aunts in Idaho died and we were 400 miles away in NV when the 7.4 Loma Prieta Earthquake hit in 1989.

I got my first taste of CNN distortion when they made it look like Santa Cruz county was shaken to the ground and burning. It was a mess and some people died but, like New Orleans, there was a morning after.

It was fun coming home to a house with broken glass everywhere and our pick up smashed under the car port.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:
August 20, 2009 at 10:08 am

Ahh, tornadoes (sp?). I live in southern California now although I mostly grew up and lived in Illinois until 1980. Even in SoCal there is the occasional tornado or waterspout. I suspect all us transplanted Midwesterners have enticed our weather with us. Lets see now, we had to flee to the Momence High School basement when a tornado interrupted a track meet, I can recall seeing four funnel clouds trying to descend to ground level along a squall line on afternoon with some friends, and what seems like a dozen times where we’d fill the bathtub with water when or in case we lost power from storms. We had our own well and an electric pump, so we just might want or need the water.

**Kristin** says:
August 20, 2009 at 10:25 am

What is the “green cleaner”? Comet?

**Wramblin' Wreck** says:
August 20, 2009 at 10:36 am

I have been through numerous blizzards. These are the easiest to live through if you have decent shelter. I slept through two earthquakes (Denver – 6.0, Tokyo – 7.6) and was hit by lightning once. But to this day the worst was a tornado. I was out on the eastern plains of Colorado on a hilltop when it passed overhead. I crawled into a drainage culvert for safety while the tornado (funnel cloud?) passed directly overhead. I know for a fact that it passed directly overhead because I heard the theme music for the Wicked Witch of the West. Incredible winds!! To this day I keep an eye on the weather just in case.
HockeyMom says:
August 20, 2009 at 10:39 am

Personally, I've been through a few hurricanes, an earthquake and a few blizzards (3 ft. of snow in less than 8 hours counts, right?). My husband likes to tell the tale of our move from Seattle back to the East Coast many summers ago. I flew with the offspring, while he and our Malamute drove a 24 ft. U-Haul truck through Tornado Alley with the sirens going off all around him for a couple of days — he thinks he lost the Battle of the Hairline as a result of that trip alone!

DryOwlTacos says:
August 20, 2009 at 10:39 am

Now there's a real summer 2009 memory for you, Mr. L!

Ken says:
August 20, 2009 at 10:53 am

I was in suburban Omaha in June 2008 and was getting gas in my rental car. The sirens went off, but the sky was just cloudy and winds were calm. Hearing those sirens scared the bejesus out of me (growing up in New England, we never had sirens) and I asked the person the next car over what the sirens were for. He looked at me and said "12 noon...monthly test" and looked at me as if he added "you idiot".

I can only imagine what it must be like to hear those sirens during a storm. yikes.

AA says:
August 20, 2009 at 11:42 am

Fort worth got a direct back in 2000. Strange to see sky scrapers with hundreds and hundreds of sheets of plywood where the windows are supposed to be.


AA says:
August 20, 2009 at 11:57 am

Downtown Fort Worth got hit in 2000.

It happens more often than you think.


rbj says:
August 20, 2009 at 12:27 pm

Wow Wramblin; earthquakes, tornadoes and hit by lightning? I'm impressed, is that why you're a wreck these days?

Worst I ever got with electricity is having a “friend” (we were 6 at the time) dare me to grab the top wire of the horse pen — it was electrified. Probably the best I've ever danced.
Kev says:
August 20, 2009 at 12:54 pm

Good coverage; glad that neither you nor anyone else was injured (I shudder to think what would have happened if any of those tree-smashed cars were occupied at the time).

If I could have predicted the future, I would have saved my tornado story from last week for this post. (Of course, if I could do that, I could have told everyone up there to go inside, hunker down, etc.)

Kev says:
August 20, 2009 at 12:57 pm

*Let's see now, we had to flee to the Momence High School basement when a tornado interrupted a track meet*

That's an unusual name for a high school. Was your mascot the “Momence Notice”???

juanito - John Davey says:
August 20, 2009 at 1:17 pm

@MikeH
Why we're the same age then! My Wife moved from Eagan MN to Sylmar in the mid 70s and they are still talking about that one to this day.

I worked for a paper distributor in 89 that had facilities in Sacramento, Sparks NV, and in Brisbane CA just south of Candlestick. In the video of the poor driver crashing through the hole in the Bay Bridge, you can see our afternoon transfer driver From Sacramento to Brisbane on the Bay Bridge – where he wasn't supposed to be. Since the World Series was in the Bay in 89 (Oakland and SF) the driver was instructed to go into the City from the Golden Gate bridge to the North, so that he wouldn't be late (the Bay Bridge traffic is an abomination in normal times, yet alone during the pre-eminent Fall Classic!). Yet there he was on national TV, caught red handed doing what he was specifically told NOT to do.

He had to spend the night in the Brisbane Warehouse, and when he returned to Sacramento late the next day, he was fired.

Then I, and two other Sacramento employees, got to cover his shift for the next month while they screened and hired a replacement driver (Curse my Commercial Drivers License!). It was essentially a double shift. I would leave for San Francisco at 3:00PM and return to Sacramento at about midnight, then start my regular shift again at 4:00AM. With the Bay Bridge closed it made for a miserable trip.


We had to get to Brisbane by crossing the San Mateo Bridge, and then head north through Foster City. The traffic heading back to Sacramento was almost as bad as the afternoon rush hour. It was...... disturbing, to be waiting in traffic on the ‘high rise’ section of the bridge, not moving an inch. The wind would blow, and the truck would start rocking, and you didn’t know if it was aftershocks, new tremors, or just the wind. When that would happen you would just look down at the Bay and consider escape routes. Only option: plummeting to your doom. At 22 years old, a bit... Tense.
Preptile says:
August 20, 2009 at 1:22 pm

Seen four hurricanes—all impressive.
None matched tropical storm Allison.
Parts of Houston got 1 year's rain in 6 hours.
Thirty six inches. A full yard indeed.
Much like the city being closed for a month after Ike it closed then too.

We hardly ever have blizzards though.

G. Hiscott says:
August 20, 2009 at 1:46 pm

Tornados or Earthquakes?
I'll take the earthquakes, man!

Kevin says:
August 20, 2009 at 2:34 pm

I've been through two killer quakes, being a native Californian: Sylmar in '71, and Loma Prieta in '89. I was also in the Bay Area when we had the huge fire in Oct. '91. Earthquakes are kind of fun, if you know you're going to live through it and be OK, 'cos you just kind of ride it out like an amusement park ride. The problem is, of course, that when it begins, you have absolutely no guarantee you're going to survive it and be OK.

I saw the distorting abilities of the media, comparing the '89 quake with the '94 Northridge quake, because of course they show only those scenes that are most dramatic, ignoring the fact that viewers extrapolate and assume that everyone in the area is affected the same. In '89, my own neighborhood had quite minor damage, so it wasn't shown on TV, yet my family in L.A. were rather panicked about my well-being. Similarly in '94, I watched coverage of the Northridge quake and had to talk with my brother who lived some 12 miles away to find that things were OK with his home.

I must say, though, that the '91 fire was more difficult to deal with, because it was the second time in two years that my home area was experiencing a disaster of such a scope. It made one wonder--and 2,400 homes burned, something like 60 people died, and I knew several who had lost their homes and everything. But no hurricane or tornado, not yet anyway. (I will say that the global warming around here is getting tedious--mid-August, and temps in the mid-60s and overcast! We've had about five hot days the entire summer.)

GardenStater says:
August 20, 2009 at 3:23 pm

@Kristin: “What is the “green cleaner”? Comet?”

I may be mistaken, but I'm pretty sure they're referring to Pine-Sol.

Mark E. Hurling says:
August 20, 2009 at 3:27 pm

Kev,

Why no, I was a proud St. Anne High Cardinal. We were at an away meet with now very un-PC Momence Redskins, arguably our
bitterest conference rival. If you think that’s an odd name just wait. In the same conference we had Beecher and Peotone. It made for some great cheers at games, like “Beecher Tool and Die”, or the ever popular “Beecher Meat Company.” We once had a technical foul called against us for using the cheer, “If you can’t whistle, Peotone.”

Michelle says:
August 20, 2009 at 3:28 pm

I rode out the Nisqually quake on the 14th floor of a swaying highrise here in downtown Seattle. Strangely, my most terrifying nightmares are of tornadoes although I’ve never seen one in real life.

Mark E. Hurling says:
August 20, 2009 at 4:21 pm

Tornadoes, and earthquakes, and bears. I just remembered I too rode out a 5.5 quake in 1968 from the New Madrid fault. I was on the 9th floor of my dorm at Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) (mascot-Saluki) doing laundry. The washer had just gone into spin cycle and a figured the thumping and bumping was from an unbalanced load. When other dorm denizens ran out into the hall yelling earthquake, my response was “What! you never heard these things go into spin before?” I looked out the window and noticed the building was swaying. Yikes!

We in the Midwest are not used to such instability. We just run to a basement when the tornado comes. On the other hand, I later learned that some of the most powerful earthquakes in CONUS happened in 1812, estimated at 7+, Mr. Richter still a gleam in someone’s eye just then. That one changed the course of the Mississippi and reversed its flow for three days.

Trogdor says:
August 20, 2009 at 4:53 pm

livin’ the good life, weather fears me. Blizzards are it, and I’ve always managed to make it home before it stranded me… D’oh! Take that back, I do remember having to rent a hotel room for the night due to one blizzard.

Benjamin says:
August 20, 2009 at 5:09 pm

I know I should consider myself lucky to say this, but I’ve never even had the chance to see a real funnel cloud even with 30 years in Minnesota, staring intently at the sky every time a big storm came. I want to see a tornado badly… They haunted me as a kid, and when I overcame my fears they became something of an obsession. I’m one armor-plated truck away from becoming a professional storm-chaser.

The worst weather experiences I’ve faced were countless Minnesota blizzards (including the 91 Halloween snow-fest). None of them seemed even the slightest bit dangerous to me, since I was safe inside.

Lightning doesn’t scare me as much as it should. I mean, I know enough that when a storm is overhead, I should not dance under lonely trees on hilltops, or point golf clubs at the sky on the 18th green… But I don’t give lightning as much respect as I should. I’ve
seen numerous cloud-to-ground strikes close enough that the thunder knocked me to the ground, and all I get is an adrenaline rush and a desire for more.

But I think my non-fear of lightning probably stems from my frequent encounters with electricity. When I was in high school, I held onto an electrified cow fence so that my girlfriend could climb over it, not realizing it was electrified until after I let go. Felt funny for a few hours after that, but that was it. 10 years later, I dubbed myself the human-circuit-tester after 2 separate run-ins with 120 volts of household current. The first time I was overly confident and thought I could replace a light fixture without turning off the breaker. (Kinda like a really serious game of Operation… I lost, but it didn’t hurt.) About a year later, I had learned my lesson and turned off what I thought was the correct breaker, tested the wires with my “trusty” circuit tester, and then promptly discovered that my circuit tester was broken. Again, felt funny for a little while, but that was it.

Fortunately I’ve never had a run-in with any seriously dangerous currents.

Teresa says:
August 20, 2009 at 5:16 pm

Saw your video yesterday right after you tweeted it. Very impressive for such fast work. Having lived in the Midwest for most of my life, I’ve seen this stuff a number of times. Then we move to the Northeast and get nearly the same effect with an ice storm!

Anyway, glad all is well with you and thanks for the video update. It’s the people with house damage I feel for the most. There will be the usual influx of storm chasers to do “home repairs”. They even seem to infiltrate local home repair places. It’s a royal PITA – best of luck to them.

Shaky Barnes says:
August 20, 2009 at 7:25 pm

You call that a tornado? From the modest tree-felling it looks like one of those wussy spirals that the BBC so breathlessly reports on when it happens in the UK once every 10 years.

Anyway, re the white tornado commercial, how funny that the eye-peeling ammonia blast that burned the eyes of Stoner #2 was considered a VIRTUE in those days for a household cleaning product.

Steve Ripley says:
August 20, 2009 at 7:38 pm

@Kristin
Since this is general cleaner that you would dilute in a bucket, I think the “green” cleaner might be Spic and Span. Lysol is dark gold and as I recall Mr. Clean and Pine Sol are also a gold color.

Much preferred Pine Sol’s scent over anything with ammonia in it, though.

Stjohn Smythe says:
August 20, 2009 at 7:51 pm
Of course, you have to have heat for a heat island effect, and given the cool summer perhaps this was a factor. Maybe too many green roofs and high-reflective surfaces aren't such a good idea...

steveH says:
August 20, 2009 at 9:22 pm

@bgbear (roger h)

We live over hill from Santa Cruz, 11 miles directly opposite the Loma Prieta epicenter. It was interesting. As were the aftershocks for the next few months.

One of our kids' friends was outside when it hit, and recalled seeing waves traveling down the street outside out house. Asphalt and concrete, not water.

In retrospect, the scariest part was realizing after the first shock that our oldest daughter, then 12, who had been practicing on the old upright piano, chose to dive for shelter under the keyboard. If it had been placed against the adjacent wall, it might well have fallen over on her.

Defrost Indoors says:
August 21, 2009 at 12:16 am

We've just had tornado warnings in southeastern Ontario, though nothing really came of it. Blizzards, pfft, as a good Canadian I've seen too many to remember them all. 😊 I'm amused at what passes for a blizzard in the UK, i.e. drifts of snow that reach your ankle. If you can see across the road, it ain't a blizzard.

Ross says:
August 21, 2009 at 2:30 am

One of my earliest memories is of being blown around the yard when a tornado touched down 2.5 blocks from our house. Still doesn't refute the heat island effect theory–back in 1965, our corner of the county was just starting to be filled in, and built on a low, suburban model, to boot(our block had been a cornfield a until the parents built there–in fact, the two old German batchelor farmers who owned the land around there had their houses across the alley from us and a half block down. Apparently, they fought & split the land, building their two big houses literally a stone's throw from each other. Still there, too.) Anyway, I still dimly recall the ozone smell and that weird green tint to the clouds(I can tell 9 times out of 10 whether there is/will be a tornado watch from the color, still) as they flashed past over & over, while I rolled down the grade from the house to the ashcan at the alley. And I remember the extraordinary sight of our neighbor vaulting clear over that ashcan(really a 3'x4'x4' concrete box) like a young hurdler; he owned his own construction company & happened to be home that afternoon, while my father was at WI Electric(gearing up for what would be days of storm duty), & happened to spy me tumbling along which jolted him into that unthinking, almost superhuman feat. He caught me like an infielder scooping up a line-drive grounder just before I hit. I grew up with that memory causing a strange sort of frisson of uneasiness whenever the conditions were right, but I've never understood the panic that sets in, especially with city-dwellers who, your misfortunes up there notwithstanding, are very unlikely to ever meet the real thing. The last one I was close to(that I know of) was while at Carroll College(Waukesha, WI) in the early '80s. When
the sirens went off, they roused us all out of our rooms & expected to cram everyone in a basement. I wasn't going to be stuck listening to a pack of mewling coeds for who-knows-how-long, so I braved the downpour & golf balls of hail to get to the place w/the least windows on campus (and a supply of liquor), the theatre department. There, we dept majors, minors & hangers-on made ourselves a drink, & when the rain/hail eased off, we stood on the backstage loading bay looking west at the remarkable sky show (it was late in the afternoon by then) & shuddering a bit as we watched that dark, ugly funnel touch down in the distance (on Wales, WI, to terrible effect). You know, if local TV didn't treat every potential storm like Armageddon, people might actually trust the warning when it counts.

Lilicat says:
August 21, 2009 at 8:16 am

Hurricanes, nor'easters and blizzards on Long Island growing up, no big deal...tremendous thunderstorms in summer. House was hit by lightning when I was 5, THAT made an impression.

When I moved to Indiana for college I was thrilled to think I'd finally see a tornado, only to find out I was in the only part of the state that did not have them. Tremendous tropical t-storms every afternoon in summer, though, and major blizzards and ice storms and monsoons in the fall and spring.

Now living west of Philly where basically nothing happens. Although about 10 years ago an F-3 tornado took out a neighborhood about 15 miles from me, and I think I heard it pass by overhead. Sounded like a low-flying jet – at midnight, in the pouring rain and wind. I can remember thinking “Who the heck is flying a plane in this weather?” Maybe it wasn't a plane at all!

Harold says:
August 21, 2009 at 10:38 am

About a month ago “major” storms hit Memphis as we were gathering in a top floor conference room to listen to a vendors sales pitch. As the vendor got his pitch started, the Tornado sirens across the street started up. We all looked at each other trying to decide if we would be labeled cowards for taking to the exits. Sensing he was losing his audience, the vendor began shouting his spiel to be heard over the sirens. Strangely, we all stayed put while hail lashed the windows and the sirens roared away. After 30 minutes the sirens shut down and the meeting concluded. The vendor, from Santa Monica, asked why no one shut down those annoying sirens. He didn't understand the threat. It turned out that the tornado touched down a mile to the west of our building destroying several business and homes.

Lilicat says:
August 21, 2009 at 12:31 pm

Oh, and the Nisqually earthquake. We were in a park in Tacoma. I remember the dead silence, and the trees and lampposts whipping back and forth and the asphalt rippling and heaving – like some big animal underground was stretching and flexing its muscles.

Doug says:
August 22, 2009 at 4:13 am
The wife and I just moved to Charlottesville, Va after living in Huntsville, Al for 11 months. March-April are prime tornado months in that region and one day I was woken up from a sick sleep by the sirens.

Being from Southeast Texas (where we moved to Huntsville from and missed Hurricane Ike by one week) I groggily asked the wife what the noise was. For the next few weeks we heard that damn siren go off several times.

Combine that with that awful screech from the Emergency Broadcast Signal (which shows a red screen to let you know it's NOT a drill) is enough to make anyones hair stand on the back of their necks!

chrisbcritter says:
August 23, 2009 at 10:45 pm

I grew up in Chicago's northwest suburbs near the naval air station and the scariest day we had was when I was six, during the swarm of tornados in April of 1967. It was the only time my dad ever sent us to the basement; fortunately the nearest touch-downs were four miles away. Next evening I proceeded to traumatize myself by obsessively reading the newspaper accounts of the event; I can still remember seeing the photos of crushed school buses down in Belvedere.

I moved to Los Angeles in '81 and had a tornado rip up the downtown convention center not long afterward... Now I live in Yucca Valley which has had its share of earthquakes and according to the Tornado History project website, a couple tornados as well (best of both worlds?).

Fred says:
September 1, 2009 at 3:02 pm

Why is it that I can watch Hulu, I can watch Funny or Die, I can watch Youtube, I can watch Netflix but for some weird reason I can never watch a video on the Star Tribune site?
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]
After I finished work I took Natalie to the Titanica exhibit. 

"Why is it called 'Titanica?'" she asked.

"First of all, it's pronounced Ti-tan-EEK-a. Second, I don't know."
“Dad.”

“Okay, that's not true. 'Titanica' is probably a word for things from the Titanic, and that's what this has.”

Or so I hope. You have to take their word for it. A bottle is a bottle, after all.

To get you in the mood, you watch a movie in the Omnitheater, filmed in Overwhelmingscope, a process that requires you to tilt your head back and make sense of an inordinately large, curving image. I looked forward to poking around the ship Ghosts-of-the-Abyss style, and was somewhat confused when the ship bearing the tiny submarines wore a hammer and sickle. This suggested the film was not exactly the most modern account of the expeditions, a doubt reinforced by extensive interviews with a spry survivor who was on the ship at age seven.

Sure enough, it was a 1990 movie. No tethered robots winding their way down the staircase to examine the dining room or staterooms. We got shots of cathedrals of rust that gave no sense of the scope or shape of the ship. In 1990, this would have been extraordinary, but after “Ghosts” – where Cameron lit the ship like a movie set and did everything but send down robots to reenact key scenes – it was underwhelming.

The exhibit itself was nice. A few homely items gave you pause: stationery, money, a toothpaste jar. Ordinary thing. If you expect to come across Jacques Futrelle’s nosehair clippers, you're disappointed, but you do get pieces of clothing, a remarkable selection of dishes, pieces of deck benches, the frame of a window, portholes, light fixtures and the like, all presented like holy relics. It's no small event to stand before a giant slab of the hull, especially if you grew up on “A Night to Remember” and never expected them to find the ship, let alone bring up the silverware and luggage.

Everyone was assigned a name as they entered; my boarding pass was for Benjamin Guggenheim, a man I admired for deciding to perish in his best clothes. The supposed last words – we have dressed in our best and are prepared to go down like gentlemen – either strikes you as the mark of a civilized man meeting fate with all the armaments of character and class, or the fatuity of someone who puts stock in the quality of his shirt and shoes and finds them proof of his right to inhabit the upper orders. I tend towards the former. Natalie was someone who was heading to the new world to
marry someone named Harry Lacon, whom I renamed Hairy Bacon to her amusement. Likewise, finding Major Archibald Butt on the list of the dead was a source of great amusement; I told her of his wife, Ihavebig, and his brother, Seymour, who was an athletic-infrastructure inspector and author.

When it was done we ate an early dinner in the cafeteria while a chill fall rain fell outside, then goofed around in the exhibits until it was time to go home. Expensive, but I'm glad we went.

As I noted, I've always been fascinated by the Titanic. The big movie is a mixed bag; I really, really don't care about the protagonists. But the recreation of the sinking is the best in the genre. And there are many: the aforementioned fifties film, of course, which I still think is the best; a Hollywood version I've only seen in parts, the Nazi version (available on YouTube) and . . . the 1929 early sound movie, which I recently saw. It's not exactly the Titanic – the ship is called the Atlantic – but everyone knew it was the Titanic. It's an astonishingly bad piece of cinema.

Do I have some interesting clips? I do, and it's part of another prototype site that's almost as much of a mess as some other segments of the site. I've been adding more than I've been fixing, and things are catching up with me. I'd like to say the next week will be spent on site maintenance, but no: it's the triennial unplug. (Christmas, Spring, Late Summer.) Then it's the State Fair. For most people those words mean “a nice hot day walking around eating things and looking at overscaled pigs” but for me it means a week, at least, of hard-core life-and-breath work. I love it, but it's a challenge. So.

Here's the drill: the Bleat will have a big open thread posted Saturday. (“100 Mysteries” later today, but it's a minor update.) Occasional Stribblog notes. The full Bleat returns with something I'm calling Project Ruffio on Thursday. Mark your calendars, as they say.

But I promised something about the Titanic movie from 1929. Very well: here you go.

59 RESPONSES TO friday, august 21

shesnailie says:
August 21, 2009 at 10:02 pm

_@_v – an interesting sidenote is that marilyn monroe sailed on the titanic – or rather the set left over from barbara stanwyk's 'titanic' movie. They reused it for scenes in 'gentlemen prefer blondes'. even reused the movie's titanic model (with one of the funnels removed) to stand in as a generic french line ship.

see link under my name for more info...
HT says:
August 21, 2009 at 10:50 pm

shesnailie: first, what does @_v mean at the beginning of each of your posts? I've been dying to know...

Second, your comment about Gentlemen Prefer Blondes is very interesting indeed... in a recent viewing of the movie in question, I was looking at that ship, thinking that the bridge was not the right shape for the Queen Mary (the premier transatlantic ship of that era that had three funnels, unlike the Queen Elizabeth that had only two). But now it makes perfect sense, because it did look like the bridge was from an earlier era (which the Titanic certainly was).

It could also have been the Ile de France, of course, in an earlier configuration when she had three funnels, but I always discounted that possibility because... well... who would sail in a French ship when you had two choices from the Cunard Line?

shesnailie says:
August 22, 2009 at 12:04 am

_@_v <- an ascii snail

_@_v – rereading that titanic site and it seems the picture shows queen mary style funnels and ventilators making the model look most like the old ss paris which was a three funnel art-nouveau predecessor to the illustrious ile that had the dubious misfortune to catch fire twice in her career. the first time she proved salvagable but on that second time in 1939 she capsized.

she spent most of the next decade on her side and managed to sink the ss liberte as she was being fitted out for postwar service. the liberte sailed formerly for germany as the ss europa and was handed to the french as a replacement for the normandie which caught fire and capsized in ’42.

the liberte had the dubious distinction of having sunk twice in her career – both times while being fitted out by her two owners. Once readied for service she developed a fine reputation as one of the greatest restaurants ever to put to sea. she worked the north atlantic alongside the refitted ile de france – which had her aft fake funnel removed – and the flandre till 1961 when she and the ile were replaced by the ss france which was recently scrapped after serving for well over 30 years as the cruise ship norway.

the ile de france suffered an ignomineous end when she was hired by a film company to serve as a floating prop for ‘the last voyage’. explosives were set off around the ship and a funnel sent crashing into the wheelhouse as the ship was partially flooded to simulate a sinking.

can you tell i'm an ocean liner freak?

Kevin Marks says:
August 22, 2009 at 2:26 am

I just re-read Connie Willis's Passage, which if you haven't read, you should, as it does have a Titanic connection as well as being a brilliant story about near-death experiences.
Bookworm says:
August 22, 2009 at 5:33 am

@Suzanne Goldman

We sang that song in school. In the first grade. And I don’t recall anyone ever telling us that it was a camp (and campy) song. So for years, I’d wondered what the deal was with that song, until I finally looked it up on the Internet one day and was enlightened.

Though I remember the chorus as running:
It was sad (so sad)
It was sad (too bad!)
It was sad when the great ship went down
(to the bottom of the sea)

Husbands and wives
Little children lost their lives
It was sad when the great ship went down

Ross says:
August 26, 2009 at 2:00 am

I'm sorry, but all I can think of when anyone mentions the Titanic is Bruce McCall's “HMS Tyrannic” in “Zany Afternoons”…

shesnailie says:
August 26, 2009 at 10:34 pm

_:@_v – hmmm how 'bout “titannic park” where the ship is done in by a cargo of revivified velociraptors?

Ross says:
August 27, 2009 at 1:55 am

shesnailie: HA! Gad, you gotta love The Bleatniks.
The sad part is that someone is probably finishing postproduction on that very movie for SciFi's weekend “Original Movie” krept-fest.

Ross says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:04 am

Oh, and James, you should've run with that pronunciation: it would be priceless to watch her do a slow burn as you decribed the safari the two of you would take one day to see Lake Titanyka, where strange currents, fogs & inebriated crews make for the occasional liner getting so lost as to end up stern-aloft on a sandbar in an inland African lake. [snicker]
Please install and activate the "Twitter for WordPress" plugin to use this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>The Latest</th>
<th>More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About</td>
<td>Why a Stork?</td>
<td>Thanks for dropping by!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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 was in the middle of a dream about setting up a new video division at the paper using only Mad-Men-era technology when the alarm screeched reveille. As usual, it took a few seconds to reorient. Where was I? Home? No. At home the alarms are much more civil. The home of the Corn Palace? No; been there, husked that. A warm room in the heart of a park named after a golden-tressed fool who got himself and his troops killed? No; that was a rather pricey room, and this room smelled.

Rapid City, then.

The last night of the trip you always choose the cheapest joint. After four or five days on the road with the family, bouncing from one tourist Event to the other, eating at places that know they have you exactly where they want you and can extract a sawbuck for a Gorton's fillet on a grocery store bun, you go for price over style. But I hadn't expected a Country Inns Suite to smell. It was a Minneapolis company. It was part of the Carlson empire. I'd interviewed Curt Carlson, years ago, the flinty self-made father of Gold Bond Stamps and the Country Boy hamburger and the Country Kitchen restaurant, and if he'd know the Country Inn Suites smelled he would have punched his way out of his crypt and throttled the desk clerk.

We'd checked in the night before. Finding the place had been a matter of marital contention. My wife was driving, because I'd spent the leg back from Deadwood hanging out the window shooting Unspoiled Beauty. When we got
near to Rapid City I checked the iPhone to get directions, and was surprised to see that AT&T had spent more than 67 cents on their western South Dakota network, because heretofore nearly every town might as well have been named No Signal, SD. The GPS put the hotel two blocks north of the freeway. We were heading east.

NEXT EXIT, said the billboard for the hotel. TURN RIGHT.

I told my wife of the conflicting data sets, and asked her which she chose to believe. She went with the billboard. Once we turned right, I noticed that the street numbers were marching steadfastly away from the address of the hotel, so we turned around. The hotel was two blocks north of the freeway.

“Your billboard is misleading,” I mentioned to the clerk when we checked in.

“Oh, I know,” she said, in an accent that mixed New York, Georgia, and London in one strange farrago of unsalted phonemes. “I’ve told them but they don’t listen to me. It was supposed to be on the other side of the highway.” She shrugged: you’re here, aren’t you?

That we were. We went up to the room, which looked like a good place to stage a theatrical production of an Arthur Koestler novel, but otherwise lacked charm. The bathroom smelled of heaped wet towels allowed to fester. The temperature, of course, was set to something a half-dozen degrees above the point where molecular action ceases.

I immediately cursed myself for not staying at a Holiday Inn Express. Then again, Natalie had harshly judged their breakfast eggs a few days – a week? A fortnight? – ago, so the verdict was still out. Wait until the morning breakfast, and then we’d see.

We intended to get up at 7 to be out at 8, and we were. I figured if we hit the highway at 8 we’d be home 12 hours later. One day, two highways – I-90 and MN 169 – and no stopping for anything but gas and perhaps a noontime meal. Otherwise, Jasperwood or bust. I wanted to get home. We all wanted to get home. By then we had no idea what day it was or how long we’d been gone; we just wanted to sleep in our own beds and didn’t involve handing over 40 dollars to someone every ninety minutes in order to see lizards, or bears, or rocks. We were done. And so I hit the highway at eight, reached for my coffee –

And that’s when the real problem with the County Inns struck home, and struck home hard.

But let’s go back to the beginning. All you need to know about the tales to come is this, the object that greeted us an hour into the voyage. Is this not a fine omen, or what?
More around 1 PM.

Pass it along, if you wish

48 RESPONSES TO *summer vacation, pt. 1*

**Harry** says:  
August 27, 2009 at 1:36 am  
Welcome back, Seamus. It's good to see you again.

**Ross** says:  
August 27, 2009 at 1:48 am  
Good omen? Looks more like a good indication that Gozer's back & his personal chef is happy because he'll soon be animate & swatting humans like flies again.
hpoulter says:
August 27, 2009 at 4:59 am

Yeah, if those omnipresent pigs in chef's outfits are selling pork barbecue, And Poppin' Fresh is a baked-goods Quisling, what is this effigy selling?

Mumblix says:
August 27, 2009 at 5:13 am

I'm the Happy Chef! I don't think you're happy enough. I'll beat some happy into you with my Giant Happy Spoon.

Mxymaster says:
August 27, 2009 at 5:21 am

Seeing bandy-legged spoon-wielding nightmares like Happy Chef from Hell and hearing about soggy-towel-fungus motel rooms take me back to my childhood vacations in the back of the Plymouth — and make me feel better about being house-poor and taking staycations.

boblinton says:
August 27, 2009 at 6:26 am

Isn't that Gollum about to hit you with a big wooden spoon?

Bob

Mr_Lilacs says:
August 27, 2009 at 7:35 am

Wouldn't you be happy if you had a spoon longer than your arm? It looks somewhat like the implement used in the Irish sport of – and I'm not making this up – hurling.

Lisa says:
August 27, 2009 at 8:00 am

We stayed at a Country Inns and Suites in Rogers, Arkansas three weeks ago and had the complete opposite experience. It was SO nice, SO clean, and the indoor pool area was SO air conditioned that you could actually SIT out there and not turn into a puddle of goo that we were positive we were being tricked. It was only $50 a night, SURELY we'd have to share our nice flat-screen TV with a family of rats and/or Very Large Cockroaches!

But no. It was a dream. Good breakfast, too; although no eggs, which are always hinky in those sorts of “free” breakfast places anyway.

Sorry you didn't have the same experience.

Mikey NTH says:
August 27, 2009 at 8:12 am

And why is Happy Chef happy? Because he is going to brain you with that spoon and drop you in the stewpot.
laclewis says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:15 am  
I can’t wait to hear whether you stopped at Wall Drug on your drive home. It’s a pretty neat place and chock full of Americana…

Nancy says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:23 am  
Giant Happy Chef is wielding the enormous spoon to tenderize you! Maybe it’s me but his left hand looks to be flipping “the bird” on the sly…

Tonia says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:28 am  
Hmmm, as soon as I saw that picture I felt a jolt of recognition – that looks to me like the Happy Chef in North Mankato. I hope James comes back and tells us where it is so I can see if I’m right! We’ve driven that route to go to the Black Hills many times, as a matter of fact we are leaving tonight for a week of family fun out there. There are many roadside oddities and attractions and I hope James hits them all… I’ll look forward to when we’re back to read the entire blog!

Lars Walker says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:34 am  
I always pitied the Happy Chef. If I had that kind of hip dysplasia, I’d have a pained, artificial smile too.

Jimmy H says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:34 am  
I wonder how much money this place spends on shoe polish.

tseib says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:48 am  
Squeaky bed. That was the source of my Country Inn night of purgatory in Tennessee. I wrote a letter to headquarters (via their website) when I got home, telling them that the squeaky bed seemed to not only amplify my every movement through the night, but was so sensitive I believed it could be used by the USGS to pick up distant tremors in Nepal. And the yellowing plastic on the fluorescent light covers, and worn-out carpet, also did nothing to add poshness to the experience. They offered a full refund, and I took it, and hoped we’d both learned a little something from the interchange.

Trogdor says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:55 am  
Since Nancy already pointed out Mr. Happy Chef’s left hand gesture, I’ll suggest that maybe it’s crossed fingers, hoping his sly smile will lure you into his silence of the lambs lair.

gmann63 says:  
August 27, 2009 at 8:59 am
I look forward to updates – the family and I are considering heading up to the Black Hills in a couple of weeks to visit Mt Rushmore and Deadwood and whatever we can cram into a long weekend. I’ll bear in mind the Country Inn Suites might smell a bit…

Nancy says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:01 am

@Trogdor
Maybe that is it…I feel better now^^

Larry says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:01 am

We would always choose the more expensive hotel on the final night (primarily overseas) to make up for all of the dingy joints we’d stayed at. Now my wife insists on nice hotels every night which is a terrific way to burn cash, especially when the kids get large enough to require their own room.

Trogdor says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:01 am

And the worst part about smelly hotel rooms is that even your clean clothes have to be washed.

Crabtree says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:13 am

While it would amuse me to no end if Happy Chef were making a rude gesture at us, I must sadly report that it appears to be a lighting fixture behind him giving us that illusion. However, I have to express my admiration for his Maxwell Smart-esque red vest. If it wouldn’t make me stand out like… well, like a guy wearing a 1960s vintage red vest under his suit in a sea of deep blue blazers, I’d wear one to my law school orientation. Maybe after graduation I can wear one…

juanito - John Davey says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:14 am

@Trogdor
Er, we wash everything dirty or clean. Otherwise, just feels… oogie.

How very Seinfeld-esque. Or Felix Unger-esque.

I doubt that I can wait until the finale – where was Jasper? Boarded? On a vacation of his own? Did it bachelor it up at Jasperwood?

Larry says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:26 am

What gang dose Happy Chef belong to, it looks like Happy Chef is giving a gang sign his left index finger is also pointing down

Carla says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:33 am

Ah Happy Chef, Mankato. He used to talk you know.
MikeH says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:36 am

Happy Chef looks like he needs laxatives.

We've yet to go on a family vacation with the kids due to financial constraints. But are thinking of Quebec City in the fall (or Northern Maine if we don't get the proper border crossing ID's) So it'll be interesting to see if everyone can handle it, our boys are 5 and 6 years old and endless amounts of no patience whatsoever. They're ok on short trips and actually behave in restaurants if we eat somewhat quickly. So it'll be an interesting test when we do go.

Bonnie_ says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:57 am

Oh, car trips, aren't they the best? I've found a good way to avoid bad food, though. Check out Trip Advisor or google the town you're sleeping in and find out the best restaurants. It's worth driving around a bit to eat a really good meal.

We also pack a cooler for the trip and refill it as we travel, and find places to eat lunch in little parks along the way. It's tastier, healthier, and you get to let the kids play on the swings and slides for a bit. Then you can spend more money on a good dinner somewhere.

All of a sudden I want to take a car trip…

JerseyAmy says:
August 27, 2009 at 10:08 am

Mankato! Thank you everybody for saying that! I haven't been to Minnesota in at least 15 years, but Happy Chef looked eerily familiar. I kept thinking, “nah, I must be mistaking him for some other giant constipated chef who wants to eat my soul for breakfast, perhaps somewhere in NJ. How on earth would I recognize him?” But I actually used to go to Minnesota quite often as a kid to visit an aunt who lives in… Mankato! I have seen him before!

GardenStater says:
August 27, 2009 at 10:20 am

Happy Chef is waiting to give a smack-down to Irritable Bear.

And JerseyAmy: The closest thing we have to Happy Chef in the Garden State is probably Lucy, the Margate Elephant. And she doesn't look anywhere near as threatening.

swschrad says:
August 27, 2009 at 10:20 am

there are still Happy Chefs? pardon my piggishness, but the ones we went to way back in the day were somewhat under the weather, and were serving last week's patrons as this week's specials.

mostly we went camping after 1969 as a family, so all the biffies smelled, all the trails were long, and most lunches on the road were sandwiches from our own stock in a rest area or a large parking lot.

but we got to sleep in something approaching our own beds.
bgbear (roger h) says:
August 27, 2009 at 10:35 am

We did the SD trip about ten years ago on the way to and from MN.
The Little Big Horn site was for some inexplicable reasons the closest an agnostic like me ever came to a spiritual connection. I had not even read “Son of the Morning Star” yet. Could have just been the idea of the completeness of the defeat for Custer or it being one of the last great victories for native Americans, a beginning of the end.

I guess if there id re-incarnation, I know where one of my lifes died.

ajtooley says:
August 27, 2009 at 10:55 am

Did they move the Little Bighorn Battlefield from Montana to South Dakota?

And Mumblix, I have to say I haven't laughed as hard at anything all week as I did at your comment.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 27, 2009 at 11:12 am

@ajtooley
You know in blog comment, one often unintentionally leaves out details, I can see where my comment gave the impression I did not know where the hell I was. I suspect some of Custer's men felt like they did not know where the hell they were.

If it clarifies things, we passed through Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota and Wisconsin on the same trip but, I did not think anyone would be interest 😃

Patrick says:
August 27, 2009 at 11:25 am

Is it just me, or does anyone else here suddenly think of that Simpsons episode where all the store icon statues come alive when they look at Happy Chef?

“Just give him the d*** doughnut, Homer!”

HT says:
August 27, 2009 at 11:28 am

Ah, road trips. Back in the 70's, I spent two summers working for a company that had me driving back and forth across the country for two solid months, hauling computer equipment from convention to convention. Some interesting experiences, both good and bad. The first year in an old Ford van with no air conditioning, and the second in a brand new Dodge van that seemed to disintegrate, piece by piece, as the mileage crept up. By the time we were done, it required a new set of tires, a new tape player/radio, a new horn, a new “dining” table, a new “captain's chair” passenger seat, a new paint job, and a new rear bumper. The last two were not, strictly speaking, Chrysler's fault; other drivers who rear-ended and sideswiped us were the cause. But it added to the overall harrowing experience.
Suffice it to say, I haven’t attempted a cross-country road trip since, although I have racked up approximately 1.5 million air miles (not counting program reward miles, either; that’s just actual air miles flown).

In the last two years, however, I haven’t even flown. It is *REALLY* good to be home.

**HunkyBobTX** says:
August 27, 2009 at 11:35 am

Do the Happy Chef statues still have the push button on them that causes speakerso nthe statue to blare out a really obnoxious annoying song? When I was a kid my brother loved to push that button incessantly to annoy everyone in the neighboring three counties. I wouldn’t be surprised if they got rid of that feature.

**Spud** says:
August 27, 2009 at 11:52 am

I hope we get to hear an account of the traditional Cracker Barrel stop. Oh the stories you could tell …

**PerryM** says:
August 27, 2009 at 11:53 am

Mankato is the corporate home of Happy Chef, and according to their website, there are still a dozen or so restaurants scattered in Minnesota, Iowa and South Dakota.

**Bob Dole’s Communist Doppelganger** says:
August 27, 2009 at 11:54 am

This is interesting to me because just last week I returned from an epic unplanned road trip that covered some of the same ground. I drove from Atlanta to Chicago, and when my plans didn’t work out there I headed west instead of heading home. Drove across I-90 and saw some of the things Lileks mentions, then ended up in Portland and, after a short trip north to see Mt. St. Helens, drove back via San Francisco and Vegas. It was great, and I highly recommend it; a lot of the good stuff is in between the places that you fly to.

**Les Mommsen** says:
August 27, 2009 at 12:02 pm

I fondly remember our trips to the Black Hills from Blair, Nebraska during the 70’s. My father would take his brothers and sisters visiting from Germany out there to show them how large America is and that there is more to the USA than Disneyland and New York (yea, a lot of dull grass lands). We did have at least one nightmare hotel experience in Valentine, NE where we had to take the fleabag that was left due to our late arrival. I slept on the dirty, creepy floor.

**Paul Bellefeuille** says:
August 27, 2009 at 12:25 pm

It appears that the chef is squatting and pointing with the index finger of his left hand. “I’m gonna do it right there and if you try to stop me I’ll hit ya with my oversized…even for me..spoon.”
crholt says:
August 27, 2009 at 12:59 pm

This Happy Chef must be the one in Kadoka, SD, based on the route James took. I also remember trips from California to ND and MN in our family Plymouth wagon too 😄

Dora Standpipe says:
August 27, 2009 at 1:00 pm

DH's grandparents lived across the street from a Happy Chef. DH has many wonderful memories of running across the street with siblings and cousins to push the button and hear the chef speak. While the building is still there, the chef is long gone. A few years back the grandparent's home was destroyed and turned into a vet clinic. It is still sad to drive on 35W going south, look over towards Cleveland Ave and no longer see the lone little white house.

Archer says:
August 27, 2009 at 1:08 pm

Happy Chef reminds me of the dummy in “Magic.” I've checked into a few motels in the Midwest and checked right back out again once I saw and/or smelled the room. In Nowhere, Idaho, a clerk asked how my stay was and I asked her if she was serious. I was on a trip cross country and had driven hundreds of miles past my intended stopping point the day before because every town was booked full. At about midnight I took the last room right in front of someone who walked in about a footstep after I did. I should have slept in the car, but did I mention I had two indoor cats with me that had to use a litter box very badly? The room smelled so badly of smoke that all of my clothes had to be stuffed into a plastic bag so as not to contaminate the clean ones that snug in a shut suitcase. What grossed me out the most is after I stepped out of the shower into the room because I forgot my shampoo and got quickly back into the shower. It was when I got out after showering that I saw dark (and I mean dark) dirty footsteps from where I had walked on the carpet leading back into the shower and on the shower mat. So after I asked the clerk if she was “serious,” she responded that she hadn't ever seen any of the rooms. Then she enquired, “what's it like?” I told her the best way I could describe it is that at some point, it had to have been a crime scene. The one positive thought about it was that I knew once I left there, no matter where I stopped, it could only get better.

Seattle_Dave says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:05 pm

I just returned from a road trip from Seattle to Sedona, Arizona and back. In Needles, CA, late one night I found a motel where I checked in, saw the room, and checked back out. Awful, awful, awful — and all I really look for in a motel is a decent bed with clean sheets, a usable shower, and wireless internet. This (despite “FREE WI-FI” on their reader board) had none of the three. I’m not even sure yet if I got my $30 back — the woman working the front desk was “just filling in for a friend” and didn’t know how to re-set the wireless server OR do a refund on the credit card machine, so I just left a note for the manager and left.
Makin’ fun of Mr Chef like a bunch of snooty Frenchies. I for one, love it. Besides, he's cooking for a big group; you think the pots and pans he's mixing it in are the same ones you use? He knows a whole lotta people are going to like the pancakes he's making and that makes him smile. Right on, Chef!

I'm confused. Was he a Happy Chef first, or a Burger Chef? Was being a Burger Chef the motivation that turned him into a Happy Chef? Or was he a Happy Chef who lost it all and turned into a Burger Chef?

Sounds like there might be a ‘treatment’ in there somewhere. Call the studios!

The Happy Chef has lizard hips

Other than that, have pity on the poor guy. He's the last of his kind. His restaurants used to be found out front of Super 8s from Kansas to Canada, and now look at him. The king of an empire of a dozen or so restaurants.

Of course, we remember him fondly not because of the quality of his wares (hardly outstanding) but because we ate them with our families in that limbo between where we were from and where we were headed.

Postcards on a wire rack beside the register, desserts in a rotating glass case, brochures in the vestibule…. Mom and dad drinking coffee out of mugs that looked like halves of little barrels; kids drinking fountain pop out of those red and gold plastic glasses with the pebble finish…..

More on the original Happy Chef: http://www.mnsu.edu/news/read/?paper=topstories&id=old-1130936328

I made it up to South Dakota only once back in ’86, when two of my Indian friends were pledged to Sun Dances on the Lakota reservation near Pine Ridge. Drove my ’72 Chevelle 14 hours straight from Denver and visited Martin (which had a nice little storefront movie theater, the Inland) and Mission before we got to the ceremonial areas. I was surprised to meet an actor I’d seen in movies and TV, Eddie Little Sky, who was dancing there. The Lakota people I met were all very nice and welcoming to this dumb white kid from Chicago who wanted to see their ceremonies, and when I said that I wasn’t trying to be like Richard Harris in “A Man Called Horse” that kinda broke the ice… Weirdest moment: As I was watching about two dozen men dancing to the drumbeats while fastened to the sacred pole by ropes held by sticks that pierced their chests, a B-1 bomber roared overhead at about 2000 feet… unforgettable.
Rather than take 35W down to 90 – the straight drop south, then the westward turn - I decided to wind sideways on 169, through the towns and hills of southwestern Minnesota. This assured Guaranteed Small-Town Experiences (TM) with chain restaurants we haven't seen in the cities in years.
Picture of the Chef below in previous post. As one of you noted in the comments, the original Chefs had a button on the base; when pressed, it issued Chef bon mots.

The chain has retreated, and you can tell from its website it’s not exactly the most vital, modern business opportunity in the restaurant field. Good food, though.

When I paid my bill I told the cashier we were off to see another big statue: the Jolly Green Giant. She gave me a LOL WUT, interrupting the bye-now-have-a-great-day grin to ask what I meant.

“The Giant. In Blue Earth.”

“I . . . never heard of it,” she said.

“Blue Earth? Half an hour away?” I asked another server if she knew the Blue Earth Green Giant.
“You mean the billboard by LaSeuer?”

Yes, that's it. By “Giant statue in Blue Earth” I meant Billboard in LeSeuer. That was the way Number One told me I would recognize the operative in this district.

We drove half an hour to Blue Earth.

See? For heaven's sake. There was a tiny little souvenir stand, run by a nice lady. She sat inside with the doors open, working on some crafts. I told her they had no idea what I was talking about in Mankato.

She shrugged. “Like they care.”

I noticed that the gas station had closed. I'd seen a few closed gas stations on the trip down, mostly C-stores. The economy, perhaps, but many people open a C-store thinking it's a gold mine, not realizing they have to carry about $300K of stock, much of which is perishable, and they'll make about a penny a gallon on the gas. A new one opens, has a few added features, and it's a
stake in the heart to the one up the block.

She said the recession had hit the town hard; a few major employers had closed.

“But the corn looks good,” I said, trying to be cheerful.

“As long as the crops are here, the town will be here,” she said. She paused. “I’m from here. I was born here. Lived her all my life.”

We bought a shirt and left her sitting in a shack in the shade of the Jolly Green Giant.

Back on the road, but this time it’s I-90. Straight shot, and I do mean straight, through the bottom of Minnesota to South Dakota, until we reached the first night’s destination: Mitchell, South Dakota, home of the Corn Palace. Do you note a trend? Yes: this is the complete and utter cliche vacation, played straight. We had a nine-year old in our party, and would not be forcing her to enjoy this through the gimcrack prism of Ironic and Kitsch Appreciation. This was for reals, as they say.

After checking in, we headed to the ULTIMATE tourist destination of middle-eastern South Dakota. One route took us through Historic Downtown, and of course I couldn’t resist. Nothing like . . . history.
As I said, nothing like history. No, that's not true. But that's tomorrow's installment.

---

Pass it along, if you wish

34 RESPONSES TO *summer vacation, pt. 2*

**Mxymaster** says:
August 27, 2009 at 1:43 pm

It's always 3:30 in History.

**bgates** says:
August 27, 2009 at 1:52 pm

Ah, geez. It's not the most vital, modern, cutting-edge *hamburger joint* in the Midwest, and you can tell that from its *website*. That's depressing.

**Dr Alice** says:
August 27, 2009 at 1:52 pm

I love back road car trips. Did you eat where the truck drivers eat? Any decent food?

I feel a little sad for the lady in Blue Earth, but kudos to her for staying loyal to the town.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
August 27, 2009 at 1:58 pm

*This was for reals, as they say.*
For reals? Nuh-unh! No ways!

MikeH says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:05 pm

I am glad the Jolly Green Giant is not shown anatomically correct, or that he a real being. If he was so I hope he would wear underwear at least.

LindaL says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:07 pm

Where is the picture of the bowling alley in Le Seuer? I can't believe you didn't stop and take a picture of the most fantastic neon sign in southern Minnesota.

Jim says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:15 pm

I like the description of liver and onions from the “55 plus” section of the Chef's menu:

“Tender and Flavorful, wit grilled onions and crisp bacon strips.”

EmGee says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:21 pm

Mxymaster:
It's always 3:30 in History.

Except when it's 2:30.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:39 pm

In the SF bay area we have the Cow Palace first home of the San Jose Sharks.

Every year the exterior of the Cow Palace is decorated with elaborate murals made with hundreds of cows, calves and bulls. The murals are designed by local artists. An amazing sight but, those pesky PeTA people protest every year.

bgbear (roger h) says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:44 pm

On Google earth you can see the shadow of the giant in Blue Earth.

I wonder if the people in Mankato don't call it the Jolly Green Giant (ho, ho, ho) but, by some local moniker like the “The Green Monster” or something mundane like Clarence.

Chaka says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:47 pm

I bet you drove through my home town (Worthington) and it didn't even merit a mention. Now I'm sad.
juanito - John Davey says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:48 pm

@bgbear (roger h)

Tim. I'm thinking they call it Tim.
Or, maybe Rupert.

SeanF says:
August 27, 2009 at 2:49 pm

Chaka:
I bet you drove through my home town (Worthington) and it
didn't even merit a mention. Now I'm sad.

I know how you feel. He went through Sioux Falls (and Brandon – I
might've been at work at the time) and he didn't stop and say "Hi."

old unkajoe says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:03 pm

The Happy Chef website is copyright 1998. Might be time for an
update.

patricia says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:07 pm

I've bought a t-shirt at that very same gift shop. Probably from the
same lady, who also was working crafts when we got there. We were
on a road trip from one side of the country to the other, much of
which was spent on I-90. Best vacation of my life.

Mike w says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:10 pm

Something must be up with Happy Chef. The built an entirely new
restaurant in Fremont, NE in 1976 when I was in college there. Was
usually fairly busy. Made up for the old Sambo's that was across the
street that closed. When I visited again in 2007 Happy Chef was
gone and the building had been torn down for a new one or
massively altered. Doesn't say much when you can't make it in
Nebraska in town of 25,000 and you don't have that much
competition.

huddydrvr says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:11 pm

In the early 90's friend and I did some airport hopping by small
plane (California to Oshkosh & back). We covered a lot of territory
in SD, southern Minn, Wisc, Iowa, and such. Never met such nice
people! Land at their airport, they throw you the keys to their car or
truck and tell you where to find the good places to eat (you will not
get this treatment in Cal – too many lawyers, I guess). Nearly every
overnight stop provided an airport car (usually a retired Highway
Patrol car that had seen much better days) with the request to refill
the gas to the level where we found it. I remember Worthington,
Blue Earth, Mankato, Mitchell (we really were hopping that day –
dodging rain squalls). Good times.
Chris says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:16 pm

What a funny coincidence! I was just this past weekend listening to your old Diner episode in which you and the Dark Chef talked about the Jolly Green Giant extensively. Made me wish I had a phone that could dial 12 years into the past so I could join in on the conversation (OK, I suppose there are somewhat less frivolous uses one could put such a piece of technology to).

Mxymaster says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:22 pm

That little hand is trying to get to the 3; it's too far gone to be a 2. History is like that, especially at 3:30.

Andrew says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:48 pm

When I was 14 my parents forced my brothers and I into the back of our minivan for a Great American roadtrip. We saw the Corn Palace, Mt Rushmore, Old Faithful, the National Cowboy Museum in Montana, Mt St Helens, and then flew up to Alaska for a week of whale watching.

I whined and moaned and moped about like any self-respecting teenager ought to, and secretly cherished every minute of it.

Rob F. says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:51 pm

The Jolly Green Giant statue reminds me of James' essay on “Spokescreatures” in “Fresh Lies.”

Ho. Ho. Ho.

Freakin’ hysterical!

JoeNowe says:
August 27, 2009 at 3:57 pm

No Wall Drug? Cliche vacation FAIL.

JoeNowe says:
August 27, 2009 at 4:01 pm

Never mind, I'm all confused. Read Pt 1 and thought you were coming east from Rapid City.

boblipton says:
August 27, 2009 at 4:25 pm

Of course they don't acknowledge the existence of the Jolly Green Giant in Happy Chef Land. Their symbol is Gollum with a big wooden spoon to whack you. They don't want to mention the big green guy standing guard over there. It's a symbol of their failure.

Do not taunt Happy Chef.

Bob
Mr_Lilacs says:
August 27, 2009 at 4:57 pm

If’n I were in Mankato with a cherry-picker and some paint, it
would be sorely tempting to add a tail to the first ‘p’, producing
“HARPY CHEF”. Now is that because I’m in need of more pain meds,
or a sign I had too many earlier in the day?

Richard C. Moeur says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:04 pm

Looks like you covered one of the Twin Cities departure/arrival
routes that we’ve really enjoyed in the past (see
http://tinyurl.com/bgtrip if you’re masochistic). I’ll bet the young’un
will very much enjoy the remembreries from this past week many
years in the future.

Richard C. Moeur says:
August 27, 2009 at 9:05 pm

Oh, and happy memory time thinking about our meal the the Happy
Chef in Clear Lake, IA several years ago. Giant fiberglass corporate
logo yum.

steveH says:
August 27, 2009 at 10:18 pm

@Chris

In the summer of 1971, a friend and I flew from northern California
to upstate New York an a ’46 Aerounca 7AC Champ. No lights, no
radio, no electrical system. Fantastic trip, to 3 1/2 days, mostly
following I-80. Watched an old VW bug, pouring out black smoke,
one morning going over the Cheyenne pass. It was passing us.

Part of the trip ran through Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and
Ohio. It was like your trip; nicest people, throw you the keys to the
car, and recommend a couple breakfast/dinner places. They did,
come to think of it, have our airplane.

Loved operating in and out of grass runways at the little county
airports.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
August 27, 2009 at 10:20 pm

Chris :

...Made me wish I had a phone that could dial 12 years into the
past so I could join in on the conversation (OK, I suppose there
are somewhat less frivolous uses one could put such a piece of
technology to).

Chris, just find one of those old cell phones the size of a brick. They
work just fine to make the 12-year callback. You just have to make
sure that you are using the proper battery and have the correct
area/date code.
Trogdor says:
August 28, 2009 at 10:02 am
@JoeNowe
I was likewise confused until I realized James was just using the way-back-machine for the new parts...although 3:30 isn't all that way back.

Trogdor says:
August 28, 2009 at 10:03 am
Closed tag fail.

NessMonster says:
August 28, 2009 at 11:09 am
Gawd, that took me back. We ate at the Happy Chef in Story City, Iowa (still open, according to the Website) back in the early '70s, on the way to or from Emmetsburg, where my great-uncle was pastor of one of the parishes. And yeah, it had the button, and the Happy Chef did recite some lines about not being able to walk into town because he got tangled in the electric lines. Just like Glenn Manning, I guess.

btw, if you're ever in northwest Iowa and driving through Clarion, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for the Birthplace of the 4-H Emblem.

Everyman says:
August 28, 2009 at 5:01 pm
For the same reason, TLOML and I followed the same route, 5 years ago this month. I'm guessing nothing's changed much. Or so I hope.

Margaret says:
August 31, 2009 at 12:39 pm
HAPPY CHEF!
I embarked on a similar journey when I was fourteen. We stopped at a different Happy Chef restaurant, somewhere between the northwest corner of Iowa and Custer National Park. My stepdad told me that there was a button at the base of the Happy Chef statue — he said that if you pressed the button, a recorded message would issue forth from the Happy Chef. The restaurant was about thirty miles behind us by the time he told me this. To this day, I have no idea if he was pulling my leg or not.
We crossed the Missouri, and were off on the next leg. Next stop: Murdo, a town that just might want to rethink the name. Close enough to Mordor, close enough to Murder, somehow suggestive of a French word for crap, almost authentically Western-sounding, but just . . . weird. Murdo. It was lunch time, and we considered touring the auto museum – Elvis's motorcycle, the Dukes of Hazzard car! I was captivated by something I saw in the back, left for junk: Two old Pacers.
The blue one was the model I had; the brownish thing had my color scheme. People dump a lot of hate on Pacers, but in an era of square charmless crapmobiles, it had a certain futuristic quality I loved. Yes, LOVED. I looked in the window, beheld the dash and the seat-cover patterns, and I was a young man again, speeding down I-94, smoking Barclays, doing a madcap 59 MPH. Oh, the 70s.
We passed on the museum, but they did sell my wife a coupon book full of South Dakota bargains. “Fifteen hundred dollars worth of value,” said the man behind the counter. Well, it pays for itself, then. You’d be a fool not to take advantage, especially when you get 10% off the after-peak-hours admission to the Museum of Small Dead Things Stuffed and Put On a Shelf, or a two-for-one at the Great Sulfer Cave.

Passed through a car-themed gift store . . .

It’s like a transporter accident on the Transformers planet. They beamed him down into a display case, poor bastard.

. . . and sat at the counter in the “Diner,” where we ate another in an endless series of fried meals. That lettuce, does it come battered? “Yes. Everything’s battered.” But my coffee’s not battered. “You want I should batter it up for you?” No, that’s okay. Y’ou sure? Only take a second.”
Back on the road. The next planned stop was the 1880 Town, a gen-u-wine Frontier village, recreated for your education and amusement. The billboards promised relics from “Dances With Wolves,” which was rather low on my list of things over which I would pour the precious liquid of mortal existence, but the idea of stepping back in time to a recreated village was attractive. I expected actors lounging on the wooden sidewalks, engaging in family-friendly acts like pantomime spitting and hat-tipping to the ladies, instructional dioramas, that sort of thing. As we approached I saw a buckboard rattling up a hill towards a T-Rex skeleton made out of iron, and thought: this might not be historically accurate.

But it was. First you wandered through an octagonal barn, went upstairs to exam the Costnerabilia – it all smelled like the back closets of my grandma’s farm house, the place where old clothes and shoes and boxes and stuff was stored – then you pushed through a door in the back, and the effect was exactly as advertised.

It's not a cheap movie set. It's the real thing. Every one of the buildings had been rescued from a small town somewhere on the plains, trucked over, set in place. Everything was authentic. It just wasn't fixed up much. This wasn't so much 1880 as it was 1937 version of something built in 1880.
1880 didn’t look like that in 1880. Small quibble, though – you expect they’ll get around to rehabbing things presently, or maybe not at all, or whatever. Doesn’t matter; either spiffed up or decaying down, it was fascinating. But the bar was totally refurbished, with a stage that featured the McNasty Brothers performing a quaint, well-practiced little song-and-patter routine. They got a few kids up on the stage, and Natalie played the whoop-horn. Here’s a short video. How can you NOT love a place where two guys in a genuine old-Dakota theater play the Beverly Hillbillies song? HOW?
Aside from the McNasty brothers, there wasn’t much strolling entertainment. Just like a real town, that is. Hot. Quiet. Natural light, no electricity. This, however, was jarring:

It’s an authentic sign. An inverted, or reversed, fallout shelter sign.

You have to stop there. No one has any excuse not to stop there, unless you're heading back. For some reason I expected Wall Drug to be in the middle of the journey; it's closer to your destination, which makes it less an oasis on the endless plain than the first taste of the tourist delights to come. You see the signs the length of the trip, each promising something different – Western art! 5 Cent Coffee! As seen in Time! Chuckwagon Quartet! You wouldn’t pull off for one, and you might think about stopping for three, but after 37 signs, you know this is obligatory. It's Rick's in Casablanca. Everyone comes here, eventually.

We headed right for the 5 cent coffee and the ice water. Better coffee from an urn I’ve never had; colder, crisper, cleaner water can't be found. I had three cups of coffee and tipped the box a dime. (It's on the honor system.) We wandered through the gift shops – well, no, let me rephrase that. We wandered through Wall Drug, which is a gift shop. The quantity of kitsch is astonishing, and if the entire complex was buried by a layer of volcanic ash, archeologists of the future would conclude we were a civilization based around the worship of wolves and lanky men in hats. Speaking of which:
The Chuckwagon boys. The fellow on the left seems to have had his lower jaw shot off in an accident. He's based on an actor who was popular at the time. I was standing next to a fellow who regarded the Chuckwagon quartet with faint disdain, and I felt compelled to be Mr. Tourist Know-It-All.

“That's Ronald Reagan,” I said. “At least that's who they based the robot on. Seriously.”

The fellow looked at me without expression, then looked away, and I wondered if he thought I was some pinko librul weenie who assumed everyone hated Reagan because he was a cowboy, hyuk hyuk, but then his wife came up and they started speaking some language I could not possibly place. So all he heard, maybe, was blah blah blah Ronald Reagan blah blah. But he probably knew English. Which meant he was just a jerk, I guess.

Out to the backyard, much improved since my last visit 20 years ago. There's a T-Rex – again with the giant dinosaurs – and an big “Mining” attraction where you can pan for tumbled rocks for just ten dollars. Three traces with running water, three mines, huge background paintings. It was deserted. I'm thinking that didn't work out so well. By the time parents get here they've already spent a few dollars on tumbled rocks, which kids cannot resist, and the idea of spending ten bucks for a bag of sand with a few useless worthless rocks inside just does not appeal. Natalie preferred to run around in the patio where jets of water erupted at unpredictable intervals, and have her picture taken on the giant jackelope. Did I ride the beast as well? Damn straight:
I have a picture of my Mom sitting with one of the statues that occupy the benches around the complex, and wanted to take a contemporary snapshot – but there was a very large man cradling a very small dog occupying the space, so no. One of the other statues seems to have seen hard times:
One more cup of 5 cent coffee before the final push to Custer. I wondered if I'd be back; wondered why I'd be back. It's not as necessary as you think. Without a kid, I wouldn't stop again. Unless I needed some coffee. Some good coffee... no, even then. Oh, sure, it's a tradition, a venerable piece of South Dakota history, but the decades have added so many smothering layers of commercial sediment it's hard to find anything genuine, anything that -
Hold on, what's this?

A signed copy of Tumbling Tumbleweeds by Bob Nolan, one of the Sons of the Pioneers. With an enigmatic inscription:

However it was bad to him? At that point I looked around at the walls, smothered from street to back with pictures and testimonials, thought of the
laminated clips that lined the hallways, the old scarred statues, the signs that were old when I was young, and I thought, well. Nine, maybe ten years, a fellow could get to the bottom of all the secrets here.

And even if you did, there’d be secrets long forgotten. People don’t know: back in the late 80s, there was a fifth member of the Chuckwagon boys.

48 RESPONSES TO monday, august 31

juanito - John Davey says:
August 31, 2009 at 12:33 am

From Pacers to Chuckwagon Boys. A wonderful way to get to here, from there.

tobin says:
August 31, 2009 at 1:51 am

I remember a stop at Wall Drug when I was probably about Nat’s age – and also remember my Dad coming to about the same conclusion you did about the stop’s necessity.

Brian Lutz says:
August 31, 2009 at 2:40 am
Over here in Seattle is where westbound I-90 ends and Eastbound I-90 begins. I'm actually kind of surprised nobody's ever managed to stick a “only 1,192 miles to Wall Drug” sign up there yet. Then again, I suspect the actual Wall Drug signs don't start appearing in that direction until you get well into Montana. I've only been in Montana going the other direction (came up North from Salt Lake to Yellowstone and was taking I-90 back.) Then again, the other direction's pretty well covered by signs for the 10,000 Silver Dollar bar, which seem to start at least 200 miles out from the place.

Ciaran says:
August 31, 2009 at 5:46 am

With regard to “Tumbling Tumbleweeds”, it's the song that made Bob Nolan famous, but fame was not something he enjoyed. Hence it being both bad and good to him, I'm assuming, unless there's a deeper story than I know.

GardenStater says:
August 31, 2009 at 6:03 am

That settles it— I've got to go to Wall Drug.

Tim Hamilton says:
August 31, 2009 at 6:48 am

The doorknob plate you pictured from the 1880 Town appears to be in the “Windsor” pattern from Reading Hardware Co. That pattern appeared in their catalogs in the 1880s and '90s, and I've seen a lot of examples around the web (original pieces for sale, for refurbishing old houses). I just discovered this yesterday and found out that's my desk's pattern.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
August 31, 2009 at 7:14 am

If anyone can pull off white-socks-with-black-sneakers at age 46, Lileks can.

Tim Hamilton says:
August 31, 2009 at 7:20 am

Oh, meant to link to an example of the Windsor pattern. Huh—looks like it's actually a slightly different pattern from another company, F. C. Linde. I've found the exact doorknob plate James shows in the picture above:

http://www.ppcollectiblesandantiques.com/servlet/the-921/Antique%2C-Hardware%2C-Door-knobs%2C/Detail

Cool!

Suellen says:
August 31, 2009 at 7:36 am

This was great. Natalie was very intuitive with the whoop horn.

I think Murdo is a very old Scottish surname. Seriously.
Blackwing1 says:
August 31, 2009 at 7:37 am

The best thing about the T-Rex is the leash on which it's being led by the miniscule human in front of it.

rbj says:
August 31, 2009 at 7:42 am

Ah, good old Wall Drug. When I drove out west for law school the signs were about the only thing to get me through South Dakota.

Off topic:
Mad Men last night.
Augh! Now we are supposed to have our consciences raised because the show is going to take on drugs and racism? Feh! And double feh!! I would rather revel in the politically incorrect early 1960s than oh, see how bad they were because someone wore blackface back then.

ColleenA says:
August 31, 2009 at 7:47 am

We just did this route in July … on our way to Custer State Park. Didn't you stop at “Al's Oasis”?! It was pretty good. Thought the Missouri at Chamberlain was beautiful. We stopped for very expensive gas at the station by the 1880's town, but since we had a tent to put up by nightfall, we didn't go through it. Looks like maybe we should have!

Moe Lane » I almost don't want to put this video in context. says:
August 31, 2009 at 7:53 am

[...] Lileks, of course. On vacation. A small taste: I looked in the window, beheld the dash and the seat-cover patterns, and I was a young man again, speeding down I-94, smoking Barclays, doing a madcap 59 MPH. Oh, the 70s. [...] 

John says:
August 31, 2009 at 8:13 am

I wondered if I’d be back; wondered why I’d be back. Of course you'll be back, and the reasons are all immaterial because any one of them is good. “Will I be back” is a question I've never asked of South Dakota, which I haven't revisited since 1994 but still think about frequently. I have, however, asked it, and very necessarily, five times of Slovenia. The answers so far: 4 yesses and 1 maybe.

ajtooley says:
August 31, 2009 at 8:18 am

You look almost lifelike!

gmann63 says:
August 31, 2009 at 8:36 am

Thanks for the early-Monday belly laugh – the Chuckwagon Boys' performance with special guest really cracked me up.
Lou Shumaker says:
August 31, 2009 at 8:39 am

That's a pretty good shot for 1988-era video.

teach5 says:
August 31, 2009 at 8:59 am

So that's where Pacer's went to die, huh? Who knew? Those McNasty Bros. are aptly named. It appears that you had a Disney trip without the Disney. Some really wild stuff. As to Mad Men, last night's episode was a real yawn fest. The whole working weekend vignette was dull, and everything else seemed to have moved in slow-mo. Time to pick up the pace! Enough with the long stares from everyone-leave that to Kevin Costner, Dancing with cute wolves!

Craig says:
August 31, 2009 at 9:24 am

The Phillips head screw on the doorknob seems to sum up the juxtaposition of old and new. Phillips head (cross drive) screws were patented in 1936 and did not see widespread use until much later...

RebeccaH says:
August 31, 2009 at 9:28 am

Oboy, did that ever bring back memories of childhood vacations with the family. It's comforting to know there are bits of America that are still the same after all these years.

Anybody else notice the irony of the Pacer parked beneath a proud Old Toys! sign?

KCSteve says:
August 31, 2009 at 9:38 am

While we have no children, my ever-indulgent wife is from Taiwan so I get the fun of introducing her to things like Wall Drug.

Although she did learn why someone married early in August should not go to the Black Hills for their anniversary. Well, unless they do it on a motorcycle.

We had fun anyway.

MikeH says:
August 31, 2009 at 10:23 am

I wonder if North Dakota feels jealous about it's neighbor to the south for having so much to see for tourists, the Black Hills, Wall Drug, Mt. Rushmore, etc.

Wall Drug, want to go, want to go. My 6 yr old would love it, my 5 yr old would love to knock over everything in the place. I want those Pacers, even if it's just to rescue them, pass them along to somebody who can fix 'em up. Somebody please make an offer on them now while they are in relatively good condition.
**swschrad** says:
August 31, 2009 at 10:29 am

North Dakota is not jealous of those Southern pretenders.

North Dakotans are content to watch the wheat grow, the blizzards roll, the other people come and go.

until they change the freakin' TV channels around again, that darn gummint, so you have to rescan them all.

I don't know about those Chuckwagon Boys, though. the Man in Black is real scary. was his name Dahmer?

---

**bgbear (roger h)** says:
August 31, 2009 at 10:48 am

Too tired to attempt to be amusing. I have been to Wall Drug like any good American.

---

**Ron Ramblin** says:
August 31, 2009 at 11:04 am

Sometimes you eat the Jackalope and …
Sometimes the Jackalope, well, he eats you.

---

**jeischen** says:
August 31, 2009 at 11:47 am

“it all smelled like the back closets of my grandma's farm house, the place where old clothes and shoes and boxes and stuff was stored. . .”

Yup. That's my strongest remembrance of every old building conserved as a tourist trap.

---

**Trogdor** says:
August 31, 2009 at 12:16 pm

Come to Murdo, see the Merth Mobiles.

Chuck Taylors can ONLY be worn with white socks.

If North Dakota only had 1 reason for me to go there, I would. I always had a dream of visiting all 50 states...still, about 20 short...I think I'll do a midwest tour of Hall of Fames and Roller Coasters in a couple years though.

---

**Seattle Dave** says:
August 31, 2009 at 12:44 pm

I wonder how many bazillion Americans HAVE dug Wall Drug. Seriously. (I have.)

---

**Bill** says:
August 31, 2009 at 1:22 pm

What? You didn't stop at Al's Oasis?!? (It's the necessary stop for those of us who often have to travel between East and West River).
Irritable Bear says:
August 31, 2009 at 1:38 pm

Irritable Bear has a Wall Drug sign in his den, right next to his jackalope. Irritable Bear has no idea why this is, but he knows how far away Wall Drug is.

Sue D Nimh says:
August 31, 2009 at 2:03 pm

Went through SD on the way to (and from) Yellowstone. Before we left, Wall Drug was on the list of sites to see. After 200 miles of signs for it annoying the heck out of us, we drove into town, said “Tourist Trap” and left. The Badlands National Park was way cooler. Same thing with the over-hyped Mount Rushmore. The mountains themselves were way more impressive than the carvings, and the traffic annoyed me. Do go see Devil's Tower and walk the trail at the base. Try to imagine yourself there before civilization got there. It felt like a cathedral to me when we walked it, and I was very glad we took an extra day to see it. If you like scenic vistas, take the Needles Highway. It was built in the 20's--and is no wider now than it was then. Also, the old folks were tough, and didn't need no stinkin' guard rails. And that's before you ever get out of South Dakota!

Yes, I am a curmudgeon. Comes from years of living near tourist traps at the Dells, and being invaded by FIBs every year.

Petronius says:
August 31, 2009 at 2:42 pm

I was in SD just last week, and Wall Drug is all you say it is. They did have a nice little book store on Western themes tho.

I liked Mt. Rushmore, and I went to see the Crazy Horse Memorial. The guy worked on it for 50 years, and I suspect it will take 50 more at the rate they are going. It was odd watching the orientation movie and seeing pictures of the sculptor's children handing him the dynamite to stuff in the hole to blow out CH's left nostril. But I'm sure Natalie could handle it.

Rob F. says:
August 31, 2009 at 2:49 pm

Who wants to bet me James was wearing the same kind of Keds when he last drove his Pacer.

Maybe the same pair.

Haven't been to Wall Drug in over 35 years, but I bet the only thing that's changed is that the souvenirs are now imported from China. At least I got the chance to buy genuine, American-made junk.

Wramblin' Wreck says:
August 31, 2009 at 5:05 pm

Petronius:
It was odd watching the orientation movie and seeing pictures of the sculptor's children handing him the dynamite to stuff in the hole to blow out CH's left nostril. But I'm sure Natalie could handle it.
Every child needs to know how to use dynamite pliers. This should be passed from father to son (or daughter.) My grandfather taught my mother and she taught me. Dynamite – the perfect tool to remove stumps!

**Kurt** says:
August 31, 2009 at 5:24 pm

The brown Pacer is a ’78-’80, as evidenced by its taller, less-attractive hood/grille. This was designed to accommodate the larger 304 V-8 engine that came in ’78. Just in time for the second gas crisis! AMC really couldn’t catch a break.

I prefer the cleaner ’75-’77 front end (like the baby blue one has), when all you could get was a straight-6 (232 or 258), which most Pacer buyers preferred even after the V-8 was available.

The Pacer is a bold design, hamstrung by corporate ineptitude. It was designed with the Wankel rotary engine in mind, which would have really been a space pod if it had come to pass!

**Noah D** says:
August 31, 2009 at 5:35 pm

Wait, wait, waitaminute – they put a V-8 in a Pacer?!

**Mikey NTH** says:
August 31, 2009 at 5:42 pm

You stopped at Wall Drug. Dave Barry said he didn’t, and his wife got into a huff about that. He also mentioned Stuckey’s pies. Are there any stuckey’s left?

I recall the family trips to Florida and passing all the signs “See Rock City”. We never stopped at Rock City. Or Lookout Mountain.

Never seen the ‘Mystery Spot’ outside of St. Ignace either. But Valley Camp is always worth a look if you are in Sault Ste. Marie.

**danup** says:
August 31, 2009 at 6:32 pm

Dakota, Pacers, Child update, discussion of historical architecture and the way we view it is colored by the era in which it’s remembered, enigmatic video from the eighties… this entry has a remarkable number of prototypical Bleat elements.

**Sarah** says:
August 31, 2009 at 8:34 pm

We took this trip ourselves this year. I have a lot of family in the Black Hills, it’s pretty much where I grew up. I love your pictures, I wish I could get a picture of my husband in the backyard of Wall Drug! He generally just walks through it quickly; hands stuffed into his pockets. If you’re going to Hill City I recommend the 1880 Train. If you’re going to Lead I recommend the Homestake Gold Mine tour.

**dcmatthews** says:
August 31, 2009 at 9:22 pm
Wall Drug sounds like the “South of the Border” of the Midwest. SOTB (or just “S.O.B.” as its water tower proclaimed) was this tacky tourist trap that sat just south of the North Carolina/South Carolina border (“South of the Border”, get it?) It wallowed in a faux-Mexican theme, complete with spokescharacter “Pedro” in sombrero, serape and Fu-Manchu mustache. Gift shops, restaurants, a few rides, a couple of motels – one building was even shaped like a sombrero (whether that was a restaurant or a gift shop, though, I can’t recall).

The billboards for this place started at least 189 miles away, and when you got to about 100 miles (maybe even farther) away, they came at the rate of one every mile. Some of them were rather clever: one had a three-dimensional model of a frankfurter on it, and bore the slogan “You never sausage a place…. You’re always a weiner with Pedro!” …okay, maybe not so clever 😆

**DryOwlTacos** says:
August 31, 2009 at 11:19 pm

“things over which I would pour the precious liquid of mortal existence”

Henceforth this becomes my motto and catchphrase. Thanks!

**Kev** says:
September 1, 2009 at 12:33 am

*Are there any stuckey’s left?*

**There sure are.**

OK, i have to say it:: Did anyone else look at the statue that James called “pioneer verite” and think, “What was Michael Jackson doing in the Old West?”

**Ross** says:
September 1, 2009 at 12:34 am

“Irritable Bear has a Wall Drug sign in his den, right next to his jackalope. Irritable Bear has no idea why this is, but he knows how far away Wall Drug is.”

Well, there's your problem right there–all those tourists driving through the den would make anyone irritable.

Sue D Nimh:

“Yes, I am a curmudgeon. Comes from years of living near tourist traps at the Dells, and being invaded by FIBs every year.”

YES! Finally, a legit excuse for one of us Wisconsinite Bleatniks to use the term “FIB”! Da'n't let that term die out. That description of the Dells is why I probably will never find out if any of my childhood memories of it can still be matched up with present reality. Water parks, forsooth.

I stopped at Wall Drug on a road trip to CA in August of 1977; had a good breakfast and a good laugh. That was before the marketing weenies convinced every place to carry the same krep, so the kitsch there was undiluted and specific(even kind of charmingly old-fashioned, like a gimme-calendar with '40s-'50s outdoorsman art). I too wondered at the mysteries on the wall all those years ago.

**Shaky Barnes** says:
September 1, 2009 at 1:06 am

Do my eyes deceive me or is Jimmy looking pretty buffed up? Lileks
been hitting the weights?

**Mark** says:
September 1, 2009 at 5:43 am

I watched the Buff Jimmy Chuckwagon Gang video, and all I could think was, “James Lileks: The thinking Man’s Peter Scolari.”

**Trogdor** says:
September 1, 2009 at 11:24 am

@Shaky Barnes
He's been lifting Gazebos.

**Kurt** says:
September 1, 2009 at 1:20 pm

**Noah D**:
Wait, wait, waitaminute – they put a V-8 in a Pacer?!

Oh hell, yes they did. Even better is a GREMLIN with a V-8 (smaller and lighter = ability to do burnouts and go fast).

One of the few bright spots performance-wise in the ’70s was the willingness of Ford and GM to continue shoehorning V-8s into their smaller cars. The Ford Mustang II (a Pinto underneath) got a 302 V-8 in ’75, the Chevy Monza (a Vega underneath) got the 267/305 V-8s (and even the 350 V-8 in California and high altitude areas). They are pretty fast by ’70s standards.

**John** says:
September 1, 2009 at 4:51 pm

I made the same trip west on I-90 two months ago. In Chamberlain, we stopped at the Anchor Grille. Their walnut pie was probably the best piece of pie I have ever eaten.

**LOOKING FOR SOMETHING?**
Use the form below to search the site:

Search

Still not finding what you're looking for?
Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!

**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
Institute of Official Cheer
Lint: the Institute Tumblr
PopCrush
Screedblog
Shorpy.com

**ARCHIVES**
All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
May 2013
April 2013
March 2013
February 2013
January 2013
December 2012
November 2012
October 2012
September 2012
August 2012