You can't say it's summer when it's September. Might as well stop with the elaborate justifications. It's over. I almost feel better admitting it; now I can eat.

A few people have asked me how I like the redesign of the Oval Office. Well:
It’s certainly brown. I hate the table, which looks like it was saved from a rusty Borg cube. Otherwise it has a nice autumnal feel – sedate, calm, subdued. If I was called there I would find the colors soothing, but it does sort of have a 4:00 PM-in-America feel to it. I wonder if occupants of the office request a new look because they spilled coffee on the carpet, and think: that’s not coming up. There are splotches on the carpet at work that have been there for a long time, and have survived the person who made the mess in the first place. I don’t think anyone who made the spill remembers the particular incident, or regarded themselves responsible if they walked past a year later and saw a dark brown mark of shame. I know I’d probably spill coffee on the first day of my job as President, and it would just ruin the event. The Chief Joints of Staff would come in and I’d be on hands and knees, trying to blot it up. Cream-colored carpet. Really, gentlemen, it’s just asking for this. Of course you could call in someone to clean it up, but there would be silent reproach and judgment: really? On your first day? Oh it’s no trouble at all Mr. President. I got up this morning hoping I could help make history by cleaning up a rug. Can I get you a soda so you can spill some on the leather-trimmed blotter? It was a gift to TR from the Rajah of India.

I wonder what’s in the desk drawers. Whether the President has the same things we do – a battery, an old memory card that hardly holds anything anymore, a dead pen, a Post-It note pad with ten sheets left (you can’t throw it out, but you never get around to using them all), business cards you mean to scan. Probably not.

What’s missing? A computer. It’s odd to see a desk without a computer. It’s odd to think of someone in charge having a desk that doesn’t have a computer. So . . . someone in the next office sees something important, they print it off? I know what you’re thinking: if it’s important, the President will know it. But I like the idea that the CIC might hit the internet now and then, see what’s out there. What people are saying. Maybe he has a laptop. White House standard issue. Wonder if he has admin privileges.

So the last day of summer was spent as the first day was spent, I suppose. School then, and school today. Got her out the door; blogged, edited video – no Fair today, but rather editing of previous work – then the hour rolled around, and I sat outside waiting for the bus. It was late. It’s always late the first few weeks. She came trudging up the stairs, said school was “fine,” and declined to pass along any details. I assume that if they start branding them with hot irons, I’ll hear about it. After 5 we went off to her cello lesson, and the sky was wonderful:
Passed a neighborhood theater – it's nothing special architecturally, but the typeface is spiffy:
It spawned a Chank font a long long time ago; wonder if it's still around . . .

yes. Then I filled up the gas tank, and you're thinking: thanks, bud, for sharing! Well, there's a tale there: I never let it get under a half a tank, but somehow it happened – and somehow I kept pushing it and pushing it, until the needle was kissing the E. I actually got on the highway last night when it was grazing E, and thought: I can do this. Today the Element took 11 gallons, which I understood to be the capacity of the tank. Turns out it's almost 16. Makes me wonder: did gas gauges ever accurately reflect how much you have, or have they always had a built-in safety factor? I'd like to think that in the olden times an engineer would fix a cold Scottish eye on an underling who suggested they build in a safety margin, and tell him we're not in the business of lyin' t' folks about their fuel, laddybuck. A man needs to know what a man needs to know.

I filled up at a yellow station, which was different. Usually I fill up at a blue-and-white station, or a green station if I'm heading to the mall on Saturday.
Aren't many yellows around here – and by yellow of course I mean Shell. I always feel somewhat sorry for stations whose brands are sparsely represented and have no ad campaigns. The company abandons markets all at once sometimes, but now and then they just retreat, and leave consignees adrift like shoals after the tide went out. The pump was plastered with information about Shell's specially formulated gas, which boiled down to blah blah hydrogen blah blah injectors blah. You might think a smart petroleum company would go for the hip & flippant campaign – “Yeah, it'll get you there” or “It's just gas. Go over there and pay more, if you want.” But no. Me, I base my purchases on the usual intangibles that drive marketing consultants to despair. If they asked me today why I bought Shell, I'd say: it was close, it was Yellow, and I'm always amused by the company's backstory – as I understand it, they began selling shells for decorative purposes, started a craze, then the son of the company's founder was on an expedition to a foreign country to find more shells, and when he learned the locals also sold oil, he decided to branch out. Isn't that cool, when you think of it? Also, the name isn't “Pump and Munch,” which is another local chain, and sounds like a website that would be blocked at work.

Seriously: PUMP AND MUNCH. That's the C-store brand for the Winner Gas franchise.

There's something a bit disturbing across the street:
Between the tattered sign and the curiously inert old Beetle, you don’t get the sense of a dynamic, go-getter part of town.

Well: back to the Fair tomorrow. If you missed today's video, it's here, and it has a segment that just cracks me up. The tumblr blog was actually working today, which was nice; you can find the updates here if you missed them. (It's the Institute of Official Cheer's blog, in case you're wondering.) Have a grand day – and see you at the Fair, perhaps.

No, probably not.

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**Pass it along, if you wish**

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**99 RESPONSES TO it’s yellow**

**Chuck (other Chuck) says:**
September 1, 2010 at 11:09 am

As you study your history, one thing you will note is the Hoover and FDR flip-flopped around 1933. While in office, Hoover promoted a large powerful gov’t, while FDR campaigned on limited gov’t. Then the two reversed. Hoover saw the light, and we all know what FDR did once he got in office. Going as far as sending a New Jersey tailor to prison for giving his regular customers a 10 cent discount on the pressing of their pants (fed'l gov’t set minimum prices on almost everything).
chuck:
OK, points conceded
Yes, Harding is getting some higher marks today- talked more about
equal rights than he did. Most of the 20's boom happened after him.
Did release Debs but wasn't exactly pro-labor. Lots of labor strife in
his two plus years.
But read contemporaneous accounts- that had to be among the most
corrupt administrations in history, if not the most corrupt (and
that's going a ways).
Still at or near the bottom of the 20th Century by any measure

Will says:
I like the new decorating scheme, with the exceptions of the table
(although it looks better in some other photos) and the carpet. The
elder President Bush had a pale blue carpet in the White House that
looked rather nice. I very much like the wall-paper and would kill
for the new blue ceramic lamps.

As for the missing computer, if memory serves, Clinton had one in
the private study just off the office. And yes, concerns about FOIA
and the Presidential Records Act mean that the president shies away
from using the intertubes.

Will says:
Come to think of it, one thing I really liked about Truman's office
was that he had a TV by his desk. Hard to imagine them putting one
in there nowadays.

Charlie Young says:
Looks like apples were in the bowl on the coffee table in both W's
and BO's Oval Offices. Wonder if Patty Murray got the Washington
Apple Growers a little favor?

Wramblin' Wreck says:
bgbear, I honestly cannot see Mr. Obama being a cat lover. Just the
opposite IMHO. How about a cavernous room, imposing chair and a
snarling Doberman at his side?

Where I live south of Denver the gas prices average around $2.59.
But go 50 miles north to Boulder and the gas prices are $3.09 (as of
8/30/10.) Who knows today.

grs says:
Looks like the end table beside the brown couch is left over from the
W furnishing scheme. Doesn't really fit with the den furniture. The
wallpaper is nice.
AnnaN says:
September 1, 2010 at 11:36 am

@Wramblin' Wreck

That must be right off 36 because I've been getting it at less than $2.70 at different places in Boulder and Boulder Cty.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 1, 2010 at 11:43 am

@Wramblin' Wreck, you are right about BHO, they haven't invented the Portuguese Water Cat yet.

I meant any US president would look more imposing with a scar down the face and a cat on his lap and maybe a gold plated 1911 on his hip.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: Do you expect me to give up my nuclear ambitions?

POTUS: No Mr. Ahmadinejad, I expect you to feed my fish

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: (Wilhelm scream as Mahmoud falls though opening under retracted ugly coffee table)

Tom in Denver says:
September 1, 2010 at 11:54 am

Hoover and Carter both seem to show up on the worst presidents lists. Hoover had a great “pre-presidency” (feeding Europe after WWI, Flood Relief, etc.) and Carter is ok as an ex-pres. (Habitat for Humanity, voting observer, etc.)

Maybe being a good president depends on what you did before. Both Hoover and Carter were engineers (ouch, so am I), many were Senators, Governors. I think General of the Army was a good pre-presidential occupation.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 1, 2010 at 11:56 am

Oh come on now! A gold plated 1911? I can only imagine Patton's comment on that. Something along the lines of “Only a pimp from a cheap New Orleans whorehouse would carry a pearl-handled pistol.” Hmm, maybe we're onto something here.

hpoulter says:
September 1, 2010 at 11:56 am

History's judgement has already been recorded:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6txna0SLpo

GardenStater says:
September 1, 2010 at 11:57 am

@bgbear:

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: Do you expect me to give up my nuclear ambitions?

POTUS: No Mr. Ahmadinejad, I expect you to feed my fish
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: (Wilhelm scream as Mahmoud falls through opening under retracted ugly coffee table)

Love it. Hell, I'd love it if the president just didn't bow down to those guys. But perhaps I'm asking too much.

swschrad says:
September 1, 2010 at 12:04 pm

@GardenStater: excellent storyline, get Chuck Jones to do the animation, we’re on something. voices, voices… ahh, let the voices in my head record it. get Warners on the phone, we've got a can't-miss script.

@MarkEHurling: also midwestern farmers in the gangin’ 30s packed pearl-handled pistols. have previously mentioned there are 5 or 6 in Mom's estate from the folks’ farm. probably more dangerous to the handler than any of Ma Barker's boys one might get pointed towards.

Michael Rittenhouse says:
September 1, 2010 at 12:05 pm

Methinks an Indian would not send a gift made of leather.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 1, 2010 at 12:10 pm

@Mark E. Hurling, did you see “Face-Off”? the pair of .45s with the black grips with dragons?

Patton would approve but, would probably substitute one with a .357 magnum.

Chuck (other Chuck) says:
September 1, 2010 at 12:21 pm

Cory, I'm not really a Harding fan, but I do like to offer a contrarian view on him. We tend to over simplify history too much. Some people are viewed as all good, others as all bad. But reality is usually much more complex. In my view, an exception is Lincoln. I see no bad in him. Even things he did to suspend basic civil rights had to be done.

Hoover….look at his humanitarian work.

Mr_Hat says:
September 1, 2010 at 12:21 pm

Discussion of any very recent president will be overwhelmed by current politics. A few “luminaries” of the past are also invoked by current charlatans, nincompoops, rogues, crooks and aspiring despots.

Extremely bad with few avid current supporters: Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Pierce.

Extremely bad, but still revered by some: Wilson.

Too current to get a marginally honest read: all of ‘em since Gerry Ford.
FWIW IMO the best Presidents were James K. Polk and Chester A. Arthur.

**bgbear (roger h) says:**  
September 1, 2010 at 12:25 pm

Mr. Hat, we could use a man like Calvin Coolidge again

**Baby M says:**  
September 1, 2010 at 12:46 pm

IIRC, in “Give ‘Em Hell, Harry!” Truman says something along the lines of “Herbert Hoover didn't cause the Great Depression, it happened to him.”

Gas is 2.65 for mid-grade (which my turbocharger requires), but that's before the discount for buying your groceries from the store that runs the gas station. You also get a discount on the groceries for buying your gas there. Win-win!

**xrayguy says:**  
September 1, 2010 at 12:50 pm

Could you please, pleasepleaseplease, stop using the forced perspective on your pictures; it makes my eyes hurt and I'm tired of TV commercial using it to MAKE me look HERE, not there, not at the foreground, not the table, but HERE! HERE! I SAID! HERE! NOT THE BLURRY BITS, THE SHARP BITS.

**Mark E. Hurling says:**  
September 1, 2010 at 1:17 pm

Well gosh, what an interesting exchange of views. Presidents and now guns. Should I make a motion to include roses, or perhaps hoses?

Some good points on the ambivalence over even our best Presidents. I agree Lincoln thoroughly deserves his place on Mount Rushmore, but there are some aspects of his words about black people that indicate to me at least that he had some significant ambivalence about the Emancipation and equal rights. Jefferson always bothered me because of his devious political dealings in the run up to the whole Hamilton/Burr tragedy, and some his backstabbing of the irascible John Adams. Not to mention his slaves.

Guns now, interesting info on the pearl handles swschrad. Never saw that in the lower Midwest where I grew up and lived the first half of my life. Maybe a regional thing? bgbear, I never saw faceoff because my wife loathes anything with Mr. Cage. The closest I ever got to fancy myself was a satin nickel finish on a Colt Commander. The only reason for that was because I was working plainclothes at the time and would sweat a lot (still do). The finish resisted rust and corrosion better. I have seen gold armaloyed triggers, hammers, and slide releases on a Browning Hi-Power. Now THAT is a pimp's gun.

**bgbear (roger h) says:**  
September 1, 2010 at 1:31 pm

“Face Off” is certainly Cage and Travolta at some of their most annoying but, it is interesting to see them trying to act like/imitate each other.
Wild Woo shoot em up, stupid*, fun and violent.
*however, someone has had a face transplant recently. . .

**MikeH says:**
September 1, 2010 at 1:36 pm

$3.05 a gallon? Is that an old Google photo? $2.67 average here in Maine. Oh yeah, weather here sucks. 90 degrees plus, 450% humidity.

**bgbear (roger h) says:**
September 1, 2010 at 1:42 pm

You know, I just realized that the bad ass intimidating president I was imagining is running the show in Russia.

**jamcool says:**
September 1, 2010 at 2:17 pm

Regarding “Pump & Munch”....

It's better than “Kum’n’Go” (a chain in Colo and adjoining states).

**hpoulter says:**
September 1, 2010 at 2:20 pm

@bgbear:

Right – “The bad guys have Dr. Evil and all we have to save us is Pee Wee Herman”


**bgbear (roger h) says:**
September 1, 2010 at 2:36 pm

Eek! To quote that great thinker Bender Bending Rodriguez: Well, we’re boned

(man, I thought people were just being mean but, BHO does wear the “mom jeans”)

**fizzbin says:**
September 1, 2010 at 2:43 pm

“Chief Joints of Staff”, paging Dr. Schnoid, Dr. Frigum Schnoid.

Aaah, the OO's new table. It only proves that you can take the thug outta the ‘hood, but you can't take the ‘hood outta the thug. BTW, I have it on good authority that Mrs.O calls Comrade Dumbo anything she wants.

Does Canada still use Imperial Gallons? Oooo, such beautiful, clear, cool water..SLAP, SLAP, quite you fool, not until President Palin orders the invasion!

The computer stuff is located waaay down da bain-tay. There's a reason the DC subway does not go where it does not go. Gasp, I've said too much...watch the skies..THEY LIVE!!
juanito - John Davey says:
September 1, 2010 at 2:52 pm

**bgbear (roger h) says:**
September 1, 2010 at 1:31 pm

“Face Off” is certainly Cage and Travolta at some of their most annoying but, it is interesting to see them trying to act like/imitate each other.

*Wild Woo shoot em up, stupid* fun and violent.
*however, someone has had a face transplant recently. . .

I enjoyed Cage's efforts at promoting the film when it first came out. He described it as

"Johnny Travolta and Nick Cage running around and shooting it out!"

The third person from *Nick* is tres endearing.

But what I couldn't get past was that they wrote the story as a face change, but the results yielded basically a face AND body change. You would think that Travolta's character's wife would have noticed something amiss when she was, *ahem* *with* the Cage character disguised as Travolta's character…

DryOwlTacos says:
September 1, 2010 at 3:02 pm

I would totally shop at Pump ‘n Munch and dine at Squat ‘n Gobble. Whimsy is underrated.

**bgbear (roger h) says:**
September 1, 2010 at 3:32 pm

For our Canada friends I would eat at Ruby's and get gas.

swschrad says:
September 1, 2010 at 3:39 pm

@xrayguy: what's the matter with photo composition? it's not like he used a 12mm flat lens or anything. those cameras' standards are more like a 35mm at widest field.

I always liked working with a 24mm (10mm on a 16mm film width in that medium) because it had the effect in the no-depth, no-contrast world of TV of bringing the viewer into the action. my best WA on the TK-14a was an 20mm, and it made a set in a corner open up nicely.

Paul in NJ says:
September 1, 2010 at 4:12 pm

... did gas gauges ever accurately reflect how much you have, or have they always had a built-in safety factor?
Why, yes. Early 60s VW Beetles had a unique approach: down by the
gas pedal there was a steel rod which ran through the firewall to the
gas tank (which is where ancient Beetles had them). If you ran out
of gas, you'd turn the handle, and presto! A gallon of gas would be
available — and you could drive, oh, 30 more miles.

Which, in the day, was about how far apart gas stations were. Or so
it is written.

Paul in NJ says:
September 1, 2010 at 4:14 pm

And speaking of Beetles, the “curiously inert old Beetle” in the photo
looks to be a ’73, or maybe a ’74. Would be easier to tell if the driver
hadn’t removed the front bumper.

Not that it made much difference in a dispute with any larger,
heavier car… which is most of them.

Mr_Hat says:
September 1, 2010 at 4:42 pm

There’s a Kum & Go near work and her more refined sister, Fast and
Friendly, near home.

GardenStater says:
September 1, 2010 at 5:35 pm

@Mark E. Hurling: “…my wife loathes anything with Mr. Cage.”

Do both of you a favor, and make her watch “Moonstruck.” One of
my all-time favorites. And one of the few times I’ve enjoyed Cage’s
acting.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 1, 2010 at 5:40 pm

Boy did that hit a nerve. It was watching that very movie that put
her over the edge re: Cage. I know, I know, I was thunderstruck too
by her reaction, but there it was. I loved that movie, sappy romantic
that I so often am, but my Dearly Beloved felt otherwise and quite
strongly so. The only concession she ever made about Cage was that
she wouldn’t leave the room when I watch “Windtalkers. For
reasons entirely obscure to me she seems to like him in that movie.
Then again maybe it was Adam Beach.

Philip Scott Thomas says:
September 1, 2010 at 5:42 pm

That coffee table looks exactly as if someone slapped on peel-n-stick
vinyl flooring tiles on three pieces of plywood.

Hurrah! So I’m not the only one who saw that table and thought
“kitchen lino”.

Imagine if whatever numpty who chose that monstrosity had
started with that and designed the rest of the décor to match. Knotty
pine panelling and flying geese “wall art” would no doubt be
involved.
hpoulter says:
September 1, 2010 at 5:43 pm

I actually like Nic Cage. He seems self-aware and plain goofy sometimes, and he can be a good acotr, when he cares to try.

In the series “Veronica Mars” (I loved that show) there is an episode which “takes place” in Cage's beach house, which a character is house-sitting. He doesn’t appear in the episode in the flesh, but every room in his putative beach house is decorated with huge movie posters from Cage films. Pretty funny, if you watch it.

Also, I thought he did a hell of a lot better job of imitating Travolta than vice versa.

hpoulter says:
September 1, 2010 at 5:44 pm

“acotr”? damn.

ssmart says:
September 1, 2010 at 7:32 pm

@Mr. Hat

Best comment yet.

Mag says:
September 1, 2010 at 9:54 pm

Maybe it's a girl thing. I don't like Nicholas Cage. But I loathed him in Moonstruck.

Reese says:
September 1, 2010 at 10:28 pm

fizzbin says:
September 1, 2010 at 2:43 pm“Chief Joints of Staff”, paging Dr. Schnoid, Dr. Frigum Schnoid.

This is close to a famous exchange between a caller to Rush Limbaugh's show at least 18 years ago (Bush Sr. was President). I heard it live and tears of laughter flowed. The official transcript is behind a paywall, but Soda-something quoted it accurately from a replay:

“BEGIN ARCHIVE CLIP

RITA X: [T]he president and his Chief Joints of Staff are planning a secret war involving their over 40-year knowledge of an encounter with a galactic fleet which has been called the unidentified flying saucers.

RUSH: Rita? Rita, hang on a minute. The “Chiefs of Joint,” as you say, the chairman of the Chiefs of Joint is a black man.

RITA X: Colin Colonel Powell?

RUSH: Colonel Colin Powell.

RITA X: He —

RITA X: Well, let me rephrase this. Uncle Tom Colin Colonel Powell.
RUSH: General! It's General Colin Powell."

PersonFromPorlock says:
September 2, 2010 at 6:23 am
Coupla points raised in the comments.
Maybe there's no desk computer because nobody makes beige computers anymore?
Any sensible man would blame the coffee table on his wife. But not in her hearing.
Lots of inexpensive, low-power (.38 S&W), nickle-plated pistols on the farms of yesteryear, mostly used for slaughtering livestock.
People underestimate Eisenhower. His baby, the Interstate Highway System, has had a profound effect on America. Maybe good, bad, or mixed, but profound.

Emily says:
September 2, 2010 at 8:51 am
I hate the coffee table. It could work in a sleek, Scandinavian room, but the oval office will never be able to achieve those lines, especially since the iconic desk cannot be replaced. (Not without people howling.)
The (big) rug has quotes on it. MLK, FDR, JFK, and some other people whose initials I don't remember.

Emmett Flatus says:
September 2, 2010 at 1:29 pm
Turns out MLK was quoting someone else from the 1800s and was not the original author. Will they add an asterisk?

Petronius says:
September 2, 2010 at 2:19 pm
Maybe instead of a computer the Prez has one of those holographic floating displays like Tom Cruise used in “Minority Report”, courtesy of DARPA.

lanczos says:
September 3, 2010 at 6:29 pm
Ahh, The (U.S.) President's “Office”: Well, let's just install Anything to make it a “less powerful place.” Just like any other 3rd world governmental 'palace' anywhere else – Zimbabwe or “South Africa” or …
So You RACISTS Just Get Over It: The “President's ‘Office’” is just any other gummint place on Planet Earth. In fact, it is Exactly Like Your Late 60s Apartment – No More And No Less.
In truth, The New “Oval Office” is exactly like any place that “our President” can comfortably plant His Florsheim loafers. Then His hands go behind His Head…
Beautiful day! Warm and sunny! Best Fall Ever!

Would you be surprised to learn I went to the Fair today? I did. Again. That's four. Two more to go. I'm not done with it yet, obviously, but I'm also not done with it in the other sense, the OH GOD NOT AGAIN PLEASE NO phase. But it takes a lot to make me sick of the Fair. It helps to make quick feints in and out, not overstay, and have an idea what I want to do. Didn't have any of those today, alas. Just showed up with a camera and a tripod and figured I'd see what happens.

Actually, they're all like that.

Here's a picture of a booth from the 70s:
And here it is today. Hardly anything has changed!
I’m doing a short vid for the paper, using stills and filters to describe the difference between the old fair and the new, the difference between the homier days and the new era, where professional signage and neon and chrome predominate. Those I do not like. They look great at night, yes, but they have no sense of place or time, aside from the bright commercial NOW. The smaller booths are the ones I patronize, the ones with low-tech signs. Every year I see the homely humble Bratwurst Mit Kraut, and I want to cry: my old friend! It has been too long!
That thing will be there forever, because the owner has the franchise on the spot, and it's too small for anyone who wants to make big money. I don't think he makes a ton of money, but you buy a pack of brats for three dollars, sell them individually for, say, seven, and profit just might result.

Anyway. Column and video night. Approaching the end of the great run of obligations. All starts up in earnest next Monday; bear with me, and thanks.

39 RESPONSES TO shortness

Steve Ripley says:
September 2, 2010 at 1:58 am

True confession time. When I'd go to the fair (L.A. County, out here) I loved to watch the Hot Dog on a Stick girls with their silly little hats and cute red shorts. Especially when they were making lemonade – so energetic, somehow so sexy. Also, during the rest of the year, they were one of my favorite mall food court stops.

vanderleun says:
September 2, 2010 at 2:07 am

Oh, the Hot Dog on a Stick Girls in their hats! Be still my beating.... heart.

As for the rest, cheese on a stick, followed by a brat, followed by a big lemonade, followed by a corn dog… followed by a roll of Tums.

That's living!

Kerry Potenza says:
September 2, 2010 at 5:11 am

Mr. Lileks is having fun with us! The picture of the lemonade stand “from the 70’s” is the same picture as the modern one! At first I was taken with how remarkably similar the booth looked “back then”,
then upon closer inspection, I realized that it was the same picture, only the colors in it are muted. And I noticed that the same people are in both photos….

Tim Windsor says:
September 2, 2010 at 5:37 am

It was the shorts. Those knee-length shorts did not exist in the days of Boston and Jethro Tull.

Tim Windsor says:
September 2, 2010 at 5:39 am

Oh, and nobody outside of Texas and Cali knew what a “jalapeño” was. Cultural and epicurean wasteland, the 70s.

Tom says:
September 2, 2010 at 6:41 am

Hot Dog on a Stick Girls?! I never knew they actually existed. There was a reference to them (even a cameo) in the tv show Freaks & Geeks and I thought it was some phony name they came up with to represent mall food. Alas, no locations in my home state of Missouri.

Mxymaster says:
September 2, 2010 at 7:20 am

On the East Coast our stick-based food groups are woefully inadequate. You used to be able to get a nice shish kebab on the street, but the guy would pull the meat off on a pita and keep the stick. Bummer. You need a good stick to get around the sidewalks sometimes.

Of course, if Nanny Bloomberg and his enablers get their way, New York won’t have any fried food either. Even the local KFCs will be serving Kentucky Boiled Chicken.

strychnine says:
September 2, 2010 at 7:22 am

…nothing gets by you, Kerry.

hahahaha

was it the guy in the exact same pose, the exact same leaves and shadows, or the incredibly perfectly matched camera angle that gave it away?

juanito - John Davey says:
September 2, 2010 at 7:44 am

Lileks
All starts up in earnest next Monday; bear with me, and thanks.

Go ahead, and take Monday off. Watch a telethon or something!
Jim says:
September 2, 2010 at 7:52 am

Oh, yeah, I got caught for a minute by those two lemonade photographs… looking back and forth… hey, wait a minute! LOL!

Brisko says:
September 2, 2010 at 8:05 am

Those designs are near-universal in my experience. We have booths that look more or less identical at my local fair, although instead of “Mit Kraut” the Bratwurst Booth’s subtitle says “any way you like it!” if I recall correctly.

rbj says:
September 2, 2010 at 8:06 am

‘Tain’t Fall yet. Not until Tuesday will it be Fall. Still time to wear white pants. As long as it hits 90 here in Toledo it is summer, not fall.

Lars Walker says:
September 2, 2010 at 8:47 am

I’m planning to do the fair on Saturday. The weather is supposed to be beautiful. It will be a Saturday on Labor Day weekend. Put these all together, and I’m pretty sure no one will actually be able to move. We’ll be stuck in place, jammed in the crowd, craning our necks to see the things we can’t actually get to. If someone yells “Fire” the state population will be suddenly decimated.

And we’ll go home with our pockets picked.

Good Times!

Kev says:
September 2, 2010 at 8:58 am

Every year I see the homely humble Bratwurst Mit Kraut, and I want to cry: my old friend! It has been too long!

I mistakenly read this as “Bratwurst McKraut,” and I was trying to decide if someone had come up with an Irish twist on German food, or if McDonald’s had gotten into the game.

(And “Bratwurst McKraut” would be a good name for a villain if Lance Lawson had ever visited the State Fair.)

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 2, 2010 at 9:57 am

Ah Duetsch, and in gothic black letter too. Wait, wait, I think I’m having a Dr. Strangelove moment.

“Mein Fuhrer, I kan valk again!”

swschrad says:
September 2, 2010 at 10:37 am

old gastronomic friend, or old visual friend, the brat stand?
Saturday is going to be a wonderful day for the fair, according to the weather peep. If they load me with OT, then we'll go Sunday, instead. Less sun, similar conditions.

Bad thing about going at the end of the fair is the livestock is pretty much gone in the pens. Plenty of “two legs better” walking around outside the pens, but I prefer to see my big hogs lying on straw, not sweating and yelling into cell phones.

Brisko says:
September 2, 2010 at 10:38 am

@ Kev

McDonald's does serve Bratwurst seasonally in some markets. We used to get it here in the summer, but they haven't done it in at least 5 or 6 years.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 2, 2010 at 10:46 am

I once dated a Hot Dog on a Stick girl and we did the graduation walk together, another lost love.

At the Boardwalk in Santa Cruz the shop is still there selling the impaled dogs, however, they split off from official franchise years ago so no cute costumes anymore.

GardenStater says:
September 2, 2010 at 11:10 am

Is it Labor Day Weekend already?

People here in the Garden State are fretting about Hurricane Earl. Last I heard, my area's looking at a half-inch of rain, and winds of up to 10 mph. And that's just Friday. After that, we get sunshine and nice temps for about a week.

I've had the top down on the Jeep since last Saturday. Shame I have to put it back up for a day. But I'll deal with it.

All this talk of Brats is making me think about making a trip to the German pork store on Friday afternoon.

swschrad says:
September 2, 2010 at 12:07 pm

Earl of Assateague.

Rolls nicely off the fingertips. How interesting is it that there is an island off the outer banks names Assateague?

Yes, I need the long weekend, thank you for asking. Hurricane Earl might just stall our weather, and stick the edge of a weather front over us, too.

Sorry about your holiday weekend off the atlantic coast. At least my relatives off Fort Benning haven't had to pack the cars and evacuate, although they've been sitting gassed and half-packed all week.
swschrad says:
September 2, 2010 at 12:08 pm

the cars, that is, are gassed and half-packed. you have dirty minds

GardenStater says:
September 2, 2010 at 12:48 pm

@swschrad: “Earl of Assateague.”

Sounds like a Brooklyn-based laxative manufacturer.

Patrick says:
September 2, 2010 at 12:52 pm

@swschrad: “Gassed and half-packed"

That’s how I felt the last time I had a brat mit der kraut. Next time, kein kraut.

I introduced my parents to the wonders of the brat after convincing them to buy a pack and grill them up a couple of weeks ago. First time I had brats was when I went to a cookout/meeting with the paranormal investigation group I’m in a couple of months ago. Und ja, es war gut.

hpoulter says:
September 2, 2010 at 1:16 pm

If you like Assateague, you will love the name of the bay (actually, a sound) just north of Assateague.


wawona says:
September 2, 2010 at 1:21 pm

@bgbear — Was that place ever “really” part of the chain?? It was called All American Hot Dogs back when Wawona was a Bicentennial teen, and that was a while back. Friend of mine's mom was the owner. It's still there, and ALWAYS worth a stop, best french fries, served vertically in a cup, which for some reason is better than any other way. Yeah, it is.

If you can bear to wait, they'll make what HDOAS-the-chain doesn't make: POLISH-DOGS on a stick. Da-rool, da-rool. I'll wait.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 2, 2010 at 1:41 pm

@wawona I though it was once a franchise based on an old photo from the early 70s where the young ladies were wearing the traditional uniforms. I'll check the book I have and with my wife who has worked at the 'walk in some capacity or another since high school.

The owners are no doubt the same with the Twissleman (sp) son running the show these days.
Kevin says:
September 2, 2010 at 2:16 pm

The mention of Bratwurst McKraut provides just enough of an excuse to mention a great line that Dick Cavett had about the blending of cultures.

He talked about a German-Chinese restaurant that he had gone to: “The food was great, but an hour later you were hungry for power.”

Larry says:
September 2, 2010 at 2:18 pm

Mark:

In this age of youtube and imdb there is no excuse for getting a well known movie quote wrong: it is “Mein Fueher, I can walk!” (no again.)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9ihKq34Ozc

GardenStater says:
September 2, 2010 at 2:25 pm

One of the best brats I ever had was at a bowling alley in Wisconsin (forget the town–I was passing through). It was a brat, combined with a cheeseburger, on a long roll.

Combined with a couple of cold beers, it was ambrosia.

God, I’m really getting hungry now.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 2, 2010 at 3:05 pm

Correction duly noted and accepted. Funny how the brain adds a few words that seems to make it better. At least inside your own head.

D Palmer says:
September 2, 2010 at 5:10 pm

Is anybody else creeped out by the sleeping pig photo from the slide show at the top? A little dried white stuff on his mouth makes him look like he OD’d and passed away Jimi Hendrix style.

JMS says:
September 2, 2010 at 5:12 pm

Assawoman bay is next to GOOSE pond. HA HA HA

Also I at first glance read ‘homier’ as ‘hornier’ time for new glasses, I guess.

hpoulter says:
September 2, 2010 at 6:07 pm

I saw “hornier” too. I think it's the font.

I was hoping someone would notice Goose Pond. That’s a long-time joke in my family, who spent almost every summer at Assateague in
my yoot.

The other Assateague family joke was when we would pass over the bridge with the sign “No crabbing on bridge” which was the signal for us all to start loudly “crabbing” about the sign in unison. Ah, memories.

shesnailie says:
September 2, 2010 at 6:54 pm

_@_v – what is this ‘fair’ you speak of?

Jose Pluma says:
September 2, 2010 at 9:36 pm

Apropos of absolutely nothing in this discussion: I got to the end of the comments and realized that that I had not seen a single troll. No idiot shouting “Look at me, I’m first,” no abusive ad hominem attacks, no obscenities. All the disagreements were amicable, the teasing gentle. You very seldom see this behavior on any public blog or website. Good work everyone!

loonytick says:
September 2, 2010 at 10:28 pm

Wow! I didn’t know Hot Dog on a Stick was still around anywhere. We had them in all the mall food courts here (I’m in the South East US) until the mid-80s, then they were pretty much all replaced by Sbarro’s. I guess I just assumed the whole company went out of business.

Karen Han says:
September 3, 2010 at 12:43 am

wow, what's up with the main page? I just noticed the men have BIG buts. or its the pants with the large accomodations…whew! Or maybe its the stool…

Jim A says:
September 3, 2010 at 9:07 am

The young woman to the immediate right of the booth in the 70s/Today booth shots, wearing vertical rainbow stripes, IS a Hot Dog On A Stick Girl, even though the booth doesn’t proclaim itself part of the HDOAS empire. The sleeveless polyester outfit, with matching Choo-Choo Charlie hat, is a trademark of the (mostly West Coast) chain, which peddles corn dogs and fresh-squeezed lemonade, just like this booth.

todd says:
September 3, 2010 at 10:08 pm

Consider yourself very fortunate. You have a job that allows you to afford attending the fair. There are many people without the means and or the opportunity to do so.
Still not finding what you're looking for?
Drop a comment on a post or contact us so we can take care of it!

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

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?
So. I started watching “The Dark Knight” a few nights ago. Again. Why, I don’t know; in the mood. Tonight I intended to finish it, so I turned on the Blu-Ray.

THIS DISK CANNOT BE READ

Really. Do tell. You could read it last night; I didn’t take it out and rub it against a brick. Or did I? No, I didn’t. So I check to make sure the firmware is firm, unplug the player, reset the settings, try again. Nothing. I try another disk:

THIS DISK CANNOT BE READ
Oh, so you’re just totally broken then, after two years of light use, Mr. Sony Machine, Pride of Japanese Engineering. Thank you. Something just snapped overnight, did it? I understand. Can I get you anything? Cocoa? A cookie? No? Okay. Well, you just sit right here while I take the “digital copy” disk, insert it in the machine upstairs, authorize, transfer, move it to the Apple TV, then attempt to finish watching the movie 27 minutes later than I’d hoped to start.

Then: guy goes into a theater, watches a movie, has popcorn, maybe smokes a cigarette or two, leaves, doesn’t think much about it anymore.

Now: NUCLEAR FARGIN SCIENCE WITH CHIMPS FOR TECHNICIANS

Thursday was a cruel retort. Cold and rainy. But it didn’t feel like anything but a passing mood, a chilly attitude from someone you wronged without quite knowing how. Now and then the sun came out hard and bright, and everything was cheerful; then the gloom settled in again. The day had the mood of an alcoholic.

I got nuthin’ today – as I said, just a stagger to the weekend, and then everything will be wonderful here come Tuesday. But I have to share some mail. I got an angry letter about . . . the 1930s site.

Your self-satisfied assessment of the 1930’s is a contrarian, magnum opus. It takes a sharp mind to mine the unseen nuggets of trivial merriment during the greatest economic downturn in American history; apple cart seller be damned.

Unless you were Harold Lloyd or a Rockefeller, the experience of many of the working class during the 1930’s was an era of economic anxiety and deprivation; not to mention the dishonor African Americans experienced in many parts of the United States at that time. But hey, that Colored music sure was good.

But I suppose the suffering endured by the majority is not as romantic as the frivolous diversions provided to those with spending cash.

I suppose your next piece will reexamine the gloomy, one-sided view of Nazi Germany.

The Third Reich

Swastikas, concentration camp refugees, Nuremberg rallies, and other grim symptoms of unending Nazi party evolution: That’s the standard view of Nazi Germany.
It's a bit simplistic.

The fellow's sig says he works for a major movie studio which was . . . known for 1930s musicals. Perfect. I wrote back:

I think you're reading a bit too much into it. I thought it was an attempt to look at the popular culture of the time, and how the images may contrast with our ideas of the era, but if you're telling me there was also some economic uncertainty going on as well, I will certainly have to look into it. That would put a different spin on things. Perhaps a footnote on each page that reminded people how these advertising images were at variance with reality – imagine that, if you will – might help.

Since you seem to be a very serious person, I would caution against other portions of the site, which deal with 1950s recipe books without putting them in the context of migrant worker conditions.

BONUS: you Godwined your letter on the dismount! Bravo all around.

The penultimate day of Fair work. Two more videos to go. Ran both Strib blogs today, back and forth, editing and doing the VO. Finished a column; spent the night on another video, which should go up tomorrow at noon. This is exciting as describing how many steps I took today, isn't it? Well, while we're on the subject:

Work has cut into exercise time, and I'm also bored with exercise. Possibly not the first person to become tired of his workout routine. Tonight I thought I really don't want to do 20 minutes of stepping up and stepping down. (Before you scoff at the exercise potential of stepping up on a device that's about 2 inches high, I bought a big box that lifts it up so you can get actual exercise.) But it's either ten, 20, 30 or more. You don't get an option for 15 minutes.

Then it hit me: I don't have to turn on the Wii to step up and down on the box. I can do it myself for as long as I want.

Wow. Honestly, this never occurred to me. I was so plugged into the program that the idea of not having the machine count my steps didn't enter my mind. Felt like a total idiot. It's not like the counting helps or matters; I always go too fast for the thing anyway, and can't stand the idiot encouragements coming out of the remote. Okay! Big arm movements! So I think I'm done with Wii Fit.

Which means the end result is stepping up and down on a piece of plastic not connected to anything.

I could have done that without buying the board.

But I wouldn't have done it. You need an incentive. In my case, it all started with the cruise; since I was going to be on the beach, I wanted to drop some
Okay! Big arm movements

weight. After the cruise I wanted to keep it off. Now I have another cruise coming up, another working cruise, in November. It reminds me of something my father-in-law told me a while ago: find a way to be a cruise-line speaker. He gave medical talks, and plied the briny deep for bupkis thus; perhaps I could do the same?

So, it seems, I have. Anyway. I thank you for bearing with these thin weeks, and invite you to experience the site in all its ruddy, enthusiastic glory next Tuesday. We'll have: LA Dining 1962; Matchbook Museum; NoDak Small Towns; Comic Sins; Out of Context Ad Challenge: Black and White World; 30s Magazine Ads (Sorry, fella), 100 Mysteries, and . . . two other things.

At least. See you then – and have a grand Labor Day Weekend. Give Summer my warmest possible regards.

Pass it along, if you wish

80 RESPONSES TO okay! big arm movements

hpoulter says:
September 3, 2010 at 12:19 pm

@bgbear: I couldn't get around the fact that his dad was a "small businessman". Are we perhaps talking leprechauns here? Did they lose business after prohibition? Maybe people stopped seeing them as often, once they stopped drinking that bathtub gin.

Google tells me there is a "Leprechaun Liquor" store in West Covina, CA. So at least one is still employed. Or maybe that's where the out-of-work leprechauns go for hooch.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 3, 2010 at 12:37 pm

Slave owning, Indian Native American killing, Nazi leprechauns no doubt.

Erin Uber Alles and taste this rainbow

Wagner von Drupen- Sachs says:
September 3, 2010 at 12:40 pm

The O.P. wrote:
“Swastikas, concentration camp refugees, Nuremberg rallies, and other grim symptoms of unending Nazi party evolution: That's the standard view of Nazi Germany. It's a bit simplistic.”

and meant it as sarcasm. But actually, that is very simplistic indeed. Why wouldn't you want to understand what made so many people go mad so quickly? Might be instructive.

UNTOLD RICHES AWAIT YOU

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

BLEAT PREMIUM

Go HERE to join - for as little as you like. You'll get an email with your passwords. The page for your bonus-secret ulta links is HERE!
Okay! Big arm movements | The Bleat.

Philip Scott Thomas says:
September 3, 2010 at 12:41 pm

Our host's po-faced critic really, really needs to sit down quietly in a
darkened room and watch Preston Sturges's bijou masterpiece
Sullivan's Travels.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 3, 2010 at 12:45 pm

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 3, 2010 at 10:11 am

What about all the "good times at the fair" talk with no mention
of the suffering of animals as they are murdered to feed the
insatiable hunger of filthy humans.

At Cal Expo in Sacramento a pregnant cow attempted to escape
the oppressors only to be gunned down by the police.

And you joke about cup cake on a stick. . .

And it was great fodder for my friends' morning radio show here in
Sacramento. Everyone had an opinion, because it ended up taking
like seven shots to kill the cow. It seemed a bit excessive, and clearly
the Fair Staff were not prepared for an event like that. Talk radio
lives for local events like that.

So consider: a terrible chorus, overlaid with some stock music, and a
quote from a caller about the proper method to kill a cow. The
result: Comedy Gold Pewter - Who Put The Cow Down. But people
still call to ask them to play it. So sad.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 3, 2010 at 1:03 pm

moo hoo 😊

Tom in Denver says:
September 3, 2010 at 1:17 pm

Meat is murder you racist nazis. Also, the cow wasn't given a choice
about the pregnancy.

Kevin says:
September 3, 2010 at 2:25 pm

Isn't 'ruddy' a good word?? Just delightful.

Marie says:
September 3, 2010 at 2:43 pm

'ruddy' IS a good word. I like 'purview' too, although my personal
favorite is 'furibund.' It took me five dictionaries to discover the
meaning of that one, after coming across it in something written in
1893 or so.

No, I won't tell you. I am going to savor the 3-4 minutes I get of
feeling eruditer than everybody else. Makes ya furibund, don't it?
swschrad says:
September 3, 2010 at 3:06 pm

it takes 7 bullets to kill a cow if you don't know what you're doing.

one drunk in a car if you don't care what you're doing.

6 regiments of wildly-drunk Nazi leprechauns wearing ceremonial native american headdresses looking up the wikipedia on their uberPads, herding ahead of them the Slaves of Godwin Prefecture.

one Texas Ranger between trains, if you know the joke.

Chris says:
September 3, 2010 at 3:11 pm

Makes me real furibund!

Economic times are very tough right now.

Perhaps there should be a reminder of how many people are out of work at the bottom of every humorous page and scrolled across the bottom of the TV screen when “Everybody Loves Raymond” reruns are played.

The godwin at the end was genius!
East Germany gives it a 9.8!

Brisko says:
September 3, 2010 at 3:24 pm

@ Marie

“More erudite.” Eruditer is not a word. Kinda ruined that.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 3, 2010 at 3:33 pm

@swschrad:

Only if you use a 9 mm. Col. Hatcher, figured this out right after the Spanish American War in the Chicago stockyards. The current Mayor Daley would be shocked, shocked, I say. (may Claude Raines always be remembered)

Unfortunately, in my anecdotal experience, the drunk always seems to live.

Jeez, I dunno. Kill all them d**n miscreant Krauts.

Ya'll only got one riot don'cha'? (Yer Honner, he done needed killin)

swschrad says:
September 3, 2010 at 4:34 pm

@Mark E Hurling: about covers all the topics, have yourself a fine Labor Day weekend.

brat? take some kraut 😈
Mark E. Hurling says:
September 3, 2010 at 4:42 pm

swschrad,

I don't have any brothers although, as I have said, two great sisters. I am sorely tempted to ask you to become part of an extended family. I am already an adopted brother of the Carton boys. Those not exactly unlike ourselves.

Jim A says:
September 3, 2010 at 4:51 pm

Why so serious? 😊

shesnailie says:
September 3, 2010 at 4:54 pm

_@_v – meat is murder… tasty… tasty… murder…

Dave says:
September 3, 2010 at 5:40 pm

In reply to Chas C-Q, et al., my father was in fact a simple bootlegger in a part of the country where that was a respectable calling. Having Repeal and the Depression hit at the same time was a bother, but he went into legal liquor and was back in stride in no time.

Chas C-Q says:
September 3, 2010 at 8:12 pm

@Dave: As it happens, I live in that part of the country myself. My grandfather was a timber cruiser in the '30s and '40s; and an unofficial “quality control inspector” of stills for much of central South Carolina.

efurman says:
September 4, 2010 at 2:43 am

Dark Knight was good, but what really keeps it from being great was Maggie Gyllenhaal. She is ugly ugly ugly ugly ugly. UGLY! And we have stupid Tom Cruise to blame for it.

Chas C-Q says:
September 4, 2010 at 5:21 am

OT for James: Shakey's Pizza Triumphantly Returns To Minnesota

GardenStater says:
September 4, 2010 at 10:58 am

@Dave: My mom's side of the family was pure Irish. Came to NYC in the 1700s. By the time Prohibition came around, a great-uncle was a NYPD detective who would raid the bootleggers, then take the booze for himself. Gramma (his sister) would stash the bottles under the mattress in my uncle's baby carriage to get them around town.

We kept it all in the family, it would seem.
fizzbin says:
September 4, 2010 at 11:10 am

Mmmmm, murder meat, wrapped in bacon, battered and deep fried…ON A STICK!! Heaven, I'm in Heaven, usw 😁

Soozcat says:
September 4, 2010 at 12:55 pm

Awww, haters pissing in the pool again. Still, it's always fun to sit back and watch the fireworks.

So we wouldn't be expected to know about the Dust Bowl, financial ruin, the WPA and other nadirs of the Thirties? Really? I mean, I went to public school and all, but even I'm mildly aware of the downside of the Depression.

You'd think by now that the Democrats would be trying to rehabilitate the popular image of the Thirties. After all, their man FDR held the reins through nearly the whole fiasco.

KPage says:
September 4, 2010 at 3:02 pm

“Godwined” ! ! ! Had to look that up. Didn't know there was a name for it. That's the terrible price of living in a cable-free area and being forced to actually work at work. How I struggle under the yoke of tyranny!

After 13 years in rural Texas, I am finally okay with exulting in the end of summer (aka The Season of Death). Heretofore, it has felt deeply wrong to say “Goodbye, summer … and I actually HOPE the screen door hits you on the way out.” But I guess even us old dogs can learn new tricks, if slowly.

swschrad says:
September 4, 2010 at 9:44 pm


uh, you should have spent the full buck per gallon. would have had old hog barn plastic pipe instead of that DeSoto radiator.

boblipton says:
September 5, 2010 at 9:47 pm

Unhappy people on the Internet venting at other people who fail to measure up to their self-satisfied ideals: who would imagine such a thing?

Bob

Sue Dunham says:
September 6, 2010 at 1:05 pm

The Dark Knight has extremely strong encryption. Many purchasers had to bring their copy back for exchange because it wouldn't play. So you're right to blame Sony, but it's probably the Sony Disc, not the Sony machine.
Mikey NTH says:
September 7, 2010 at 10:46 am

Wow. An uninvited lecture about the horrors of the Great Depression and the way American society wasn’t perfect. As if no one has ever mentioned that before. Me, I like to see the old ads because it is something that provided the constant background of the time. Something that was geared to what the people then saw themselves (ideally) as, what were the references that could be made in a short sketch that would tie things together.

For the doom and gloom of the dust bowl – I can find that everywhere. For the little stuff of the common thread of life – not so easy.

Vader says:
September 13, 2010 at 2:44 pm

“Your self-satisfied assessment of the 1930’s is a contrarian, magnum opus. It takes a sharp mind to mine the unseen nuggets of trivial merriment during the greatest economic downturn in American history; apple cart seller be damned.”

Humor … it is a difficult concept.
Okay! Big arm movements | The Bleat.

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?
Fall came in with surly impatience, accompanied by unprepared underlings who hadn't coordinated a thing. Rain! Sun! More rain, cool wind, hot sun, sprinkles, wind, calm – it's like backstage at “Noises Off” around here. The weather forecasts are good ‘n’ dire, with long sleeves and long pants forecast for a fortnight. I know we'll get warm weather again; we always do. But I hate this change. Meet the new boss. Nothing like the old boss at all.

But there are traditions; even though summer turned its back on us with baffling abruptness last week – something we said? something we did? – we have to assemble at the Giant Swede's for the Labor Day BBQ, and even if the sun has fled and the rain spits down now and then we sit outside under the big umbrella, and watch the dogs bounce and bound. (The kids, now being older and way past the point of playing on small plastic slides to the delight of beaming proud parents, slip away and amuse themselves.) When dinner is done the menfolk sit outside with cigars and listen to music old and new and everything's just about right.

So. Fall. At least the grocery stores are up to speed on the impending shift; I
saw some sugary wads in the snack aisle that prepared you for Brown Season. Mmmm, mmmm:

It's a Rice Krispee bar with orange food coloring. Then there's the Grinning Death-Head Soft Food Ration:

Hey, kids! I'm coming for you in the night, when you're asleep! You'll have nothing to say about it. I like to eat the childhood memories you're just about to forget. That's why you don't remember what it was like to be three. They're so tender.
As befits Labor Day weekend, I worked. Usually do. I had one last Fair video to do, based on some wonderful twilight shots of the Midway. This requires coming up with some music, and while walking up the stairs Saturday night I just whistled an obvious, simple theme, and thought: well, bingo. Got out the keyboard, and did the basics. But I knew I needed more footage, dammitall, so it was back to the Fair on Sunday.

The view from the parking lot where you catch the shuttle buses.

It's along an old rail corridor where the trains stopped at the grain elevators.
to fill up, rumble off, and feed the world. They’re impressive structures, functional and unadorned, but beautiful in their own stark way. I love enormous things from long ago; they seem like relics from an age of giants. Which, in a way, they are.

En route I found myself standing in the aisle of the bus, with nothing onto which I could hold. It was a coach bus rented for the trip, and had no rails like a passenger bus. Well, the ride was smooth, and merrily we sped along the secret backroad to the fair UNTIL SOMEONE CUT IN FRONT OF US and the driver slammed on the brakes and everyone in the aisle, your host included, was thrown forward about six feet. Good fun! What do people do after something like that, when no one’s hurt? Right: they laugh. Because it’s not an airplane.

At the Fair, something I forgot to put in my new-and-old video. My good friend, Tom Thumb:

He’s light as a feather! And he might be the oldest commercial mascot on the grounds; the logo goes back to 1949, and has roots in commercial illustration styles that go back even farther. Certainly pre-modern; if he’d come along five years later, he would be stylized and angular with no details, a big nose, squat legs. You know the type.

I ate at a place I hadn’t tried before, since this was New Food Fair Year. Mike’s. It has a picture of a Wimpy-type character, and offers hamburgers. The line was reasonable. The hamburger was delightfully small, and cheap – $1.50. So I sat on the curb while the people streamed by and ate my hamburger, then got up and said goodbye to the Fair and took the bus home. I poured a drink and edited the video, then rewrote the music and put it all together. It’s HERE. If it’s not there, it’s HERE.

Today I present a small new blog – yes, something else for you to bookmark, thank you – called FLOTSAM. It’s simply a list of updates to the site. So in case you miss something here, you can always find it on FLOTSAM. HERE! It has today's updates, so go there.

Staggering back after the long weekend. The long summer. See you at
PopCrush and Tumblr and if I had more strength I’d link, but it’s 1:07 AM and sleep . . . ah. Sleep. There you are.

Pass it along, if you wish

33 RESPONSES TO *one thing ends and another thing begins*

**Jeff** says:
September 7, 2010 at 4:46 am

“So I sat on the curb while the people streamed by and ate my hamburger…”

Man, I hate it when people do that. Hope you got at least the first bite!

**Kerry Potenza** says:
September 7, 2010 at 5:44 am

The grinning Death Heads. I was thinking, “Who buys this stuff?”
But it occurred to me – well meaning grandparents. The parents wonder why the kiddies suffer terrible nightmares after visiting Granny and Gramps...

**Sue Dunham** says:
September 7, 2010 at 5:50 am

Wow! James, I really liked your video. It sure is sharper than YouTube; how do you do that?
Also, how do you get screen shots of your 100 mysteries? Since I installed Leopard, all I get are gray checker boards.

**Grebmarr** says:
September 7, 2010 at 5:55 am

“So I sat on the curb while the people streamed by and ate my hamburger…”

@Jeff: You beat me to it. I was wondering how many people he was able to feed with one hamburger.

**GardenStater** says:
September 7, 2010 at 6:08 am

“I was wondering how many people he was able to feed with one hamburger.”

Probably not too many. He said it was a small hamburger.

Maybe it was the music, or the silent-movie feeling of the video, but I found myself filled with melancholy while watching the last Fair video.

It must be fall. Crap.
boblipton says:
September 7, 2010 at 6:31 am

It the modern equivalent of Fish and loaves. Unless he kept adding more ketchup.

Bob

hpoulter says:
September 7, 2010 at 6:40 am

@Kerry – I would buy them. And I'm not a grand-parent, or even particularly well-meaning. The idea of demonic cookies just appeals to me. I always thought “Debbie's” smile looked a little haunted.

I’ll be on the lookout for them.

John says:
September 7, 2010 at 7:39 am

Silos always please – the bigger the better! – but is that a bike path leading up to them? Is that what used to be the railbed? What a mighty tumble a railroad has taken, when its swath now conducts such prissy traffic. I'm a keen cyclist, but I never take bike paths. Besides not going anywhere and being full of low-cranial-oxygen joggers, their fraudulent virtue offends. OK, now I will stop!

juanito - John Davey says:
September 7, 2010 at 7:52 am

The kids noted (with glee) that Target already has some Christmas buffoonery on display in the absolute very back isle of the store. Noted a Spirit Halloween Store, those vagabond drifters of the season, opened up at the beginning of August. Sigh.

And yes, even though it was in the mid nineties as I mowed the lawn on Saturday, I observed a significant amount of leafs from the oaks in the yard. Must be a conspiracy.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 7, 2010 at 8:03 am

Neglected to inquire: Did our Host go to the KISS concert on Saturday evening at the Minnesota State Fair? I mean, for journalistic purposes only...

Grebmar says:
September 7, 2010 at 8:30 am

@Garden Stater: I was thinking about the loaves and the fishes.

RPD says:
September 7, 2010 at 8:43 am

@Grebmar, @Garden Stater: If he's having success with that, then we gotta throw some water in his path and see what happens...
Silrette says:
September 7, 2010 at 9:02 am

12 comments is too late to be first with hamburger-eating passers-by.

I love the changing seasonal Hershey Kisses. While Christmas kisses were red, green, or silver, Hershey would cleverly remove the green from the pack and voila: Valentine's kisses. My office candy dispenser was always seasonally correct, every day (every day) of the year.

Our fair opens Friday. Can't wait.

Paul says:
September 7, 2010 at 10:07 am

That “Comfort Conditioned” tag line brings back memories. One of my college instructors was the Ad guy who came up with that slogan and the whole advertising campaign surrounding it… I think it was for insulation. He was quite proud of it, and showed us the entirety of the print ads that used that line. (I thought it was a somewhat clunky slogan, but refrained from uttering that comment.)

And I got the sense he never matched this one campaign from long ago, and ended up a college instructor instead of a bigtime ad exec.

swschrad says:
September 7, 2010 at 10:41 am

nice closing video, good track.

we've got Mom's estate house sold, 240 miles away, and have to clean it out of 51 years of life and accumulations by October 14th, so it's presentable for a buyer walk-through if before closing the 15th.

(lagbolt) Fall, that's going to be melancholy.

the lucky buyers of this Showcase will receive absolutely FREE, a lawn mower, snowblower, gardening tools, and a complete suite of new appliances!

which reminds me, I need to scare up a salvage (too cheap for new) paddle reel for our snowblower. broke mid-season. son #3 took it to work, and got it welded. alas, welded about 30 degrees out of optimum, my chalk marks for alignment rubbed off. son #3 bought it, so we're not going to swap our blower with mom's, although we're doing that with the mower. I'll fix it.

she always said, “If the next folks don't want the garden, they can't have the house!” well, there was a larger than usual X through the contract box stating buyers expect the garden.

I like you guys already.

RickRick says:
September 7, 2010 at 11:22 am

Item 1: Little Debbie everythings are my secret vice.

Item 2: Jesus, God, man... now a Flotsam site to recap updates!? Don't you have enough to do?
bgbear (roger h) says:
September 7, 2010 at 11:39 am

I remember looking for the windmill when we visited LA when I was a kid.

Van de Kamp used to retail their baked goods as well and were a lot like Entenmanns.

Nan says:
September 7, 2010 at 11:47 am

Nice job on the music. Simple, with just the right dose of poignancy.

Rubo says:
September 7, 2010 at 12:03 pm

I agree with Nan, great way to end your videos of the fair.

RickRick: Like the girl in “The Ring” “Lileks never sleeps!”

Joan says:
September 7, 2010 at 12:05 pm

I'm not well-meaning grandparent yet, but I sheepishly admit that I have actually eaten Little Debbie's “Pumpkin Delights,” and they are, well, delightful. Most of the other stuff are too lard-y for my taste.

Joan says:
September 7, 2010 at 12:08 pm

Make that most IS too lard-y for my taste. It's still early in Seattle. . . .

GardenStater says:
September 7, 2010 at 12:14 pm

When I appeared on Jeopardy back in '96, one of my prizes was a supply of Little Debbie Snack Cakes. A big box arrived on my doorstep months later, literally filled with boxes of Little Debbies. (They must have a custom-made shipper–no room for any filler, just top-to-bottom, side-to-side Snack Cakes.)

Needless to say, I soon lost my appetite for them.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 7, 2010 at 1:08 pm

Is that prize above or below the home edition of the Jeopardy game?

😊

Janice says:
September 7, 2010 at 1:11 pm

@John: You're right, there is a bike path by those old grain elevators, but it's not on the railbed—the rail beds actually cut across the bike path/transitway combination a couple of times. The State Fair buses make use of a limited-access road between the two U of M campuses (inter-campus shuttles run on it year-round, and not much else)—and
the State Fairgrounds are adjacent to the St. Paul campus. There's a bike path that runs right alongside that road. Super convenient for my bike commute to Minneapolis from St. Paul's Midway neighborhood, when I'm so inclined.

swschrad says:
September 7, 2010 at 1:14 pm
@bgbear: depends on your taste buds 😊

Wagner von Drupen- Sachs says:
September 7, 2010 at 2:35 pm
See, how many real humans would just drop a “(lagbolt)” in the middle of a post? That's something a Solenoid Robot (cf. Roger Ramjet) would do. There's something a little mechanical about the swiss chard guy.

swschrad says:
September 7, 2010 at 3:00 pm
that's an automatic response, Wagner von D-S.

moderator, open the door to the test chamber.

GardenStater says:
September 7, 2010 at 4:00 pm
@bgbear: “Is that prize above or below the home edition of the Jeopardy game?”
Considering the home game I got was on floppy disks, I’d say it's above. (This was back when Alex still had a mustache, mind you.)

Bob W. says:
September 7, 2010 at 9:50 pm
Wagner von Drupen-Sachs:
“That's something a Solenoid Robot (cf. Roger Ramjet) would do.”
Thank you for solving an ancient mystery! I had a conversation years ago with a friend, and somehow “Solenoid Robot” came up. Neither of us could remember where that was from.

Didn't they go around saying, “Buzz – click – Solenoid Robot”, or do I remember that wrong?

Mr_Hat says:
September 8, 2010 at 6:37 am
No foodstuffs when I was on Jeopardy (Y2K). I was kind of hoping for a big ol' pallet of rice-a-roni. Home game is a handheld geegow that's still in pristine packaging. It, along with a photo of Alex & me, was the only actual merchandise. There was a check and a gift card, but nothing tangible.

Lisa from MT says:
September 9, 2010 at 1:29 pm
Thank you so much for that lovely video! I've been away for 10
years now and miss the fair a little more each year. Your video, with the perfect music, summed it all up perfectly. It made my day much better.

**Ed says:**
September 9, 2010 at 2:36 pm


**Julia says:**
September 10, 2010 at 1:50 pm

We still use grain… where does it all go now?
The grind resumes. Not too much of a grind, though. It's a good life. But the days of writing outside in the gazebo slammed to a halt with the sudden cold weather – 95 last week at this time, 55 today. It's like being kicked out of your office, or forced to move to another one. I suppose I'll have to spend more time at the office now, as I did during the long hectic jumped-up Time of Being Ted, last year and earlier this year. (I mean Ted Baxter, of course. Remember when I was a TV newsreader on the web? A thousand years ago.) I still have my desk; I was there today, in fact. It's spare. I prefer a spare cubicle, but well-appointed: a tasteful lamp that speaks of aesthetic ideas that set me apart (I am totally different than that person over there; gaze upon our lamps, which came from the same Target aisle but intimate different
opinions and personalities), a few family pictures to indicate I am not a lone molecule circling the guttering flame of my own solipsistic existence, something kitschy for desk flair to indicate that my middle-aged demographic stature does not prevent me from being “with-it” and “in tune” with the culture of the moment, and a big plastic jug of cheap scotch to lay the groundwork for claiming an alcoholic-related disability in case anyone wants to make me work harder. You can’t! I have a problem!

Well, no, but I do miss the days when there was an office bottle. Not that I ever knew those days. Not that I would have had one. I’m not thinking Mad-Men style drinking, where people take naps at 11 AM to sleep off the previous night’s drinking, then take a 2 PM nap to ride out the lunchtime cocktails, then rouse themselves at five to get a good start on the evening drinking to come. The reality of the Office Bottle is headaches and late mornings and nothing getting done; it’s being the person who drinks coffee and works hard and stays late and worries about the checkbook balance, and walking past someone’s office and seeing them pull out the Office Bottle, and feeling another hot stab of anger.

Although it depends. Depends on the profession. I’ve told this story before, here, but when I got to DC the office culture hadn’t yet been changed by the new boss. The new boss was not the same as the old boss. The new boss was a hard case, if the situation required. She was not an abolitionist prune-faced prude who’d cut you dead if you liked your tipple – she was old friends with Molly Ivins, for heaven’s sake – but she’d also sat down someone I knew and said “you’re drinking too much” and packed said person off to a stint in a drying-out house. More or less. The new boss came into a shop that had some noontime drinkers. This was DC, after all: long lunches on the tab, steak and whiskey, noon to two, schmooze, gossip, policy ideas floated, journalists courted, messages shaped. Before the web there were the innumerable dark smoky nooks with red velvet on the walls and maitre d’s and heavy menus and the idea that one is entitled to this, really; you have to play the game, and this is where the game is played, and my readers will benefit from the things I learn. Cheers. Clink. Waiter? We’re ready.

One of the old reporters took me downstairs to give me a primer on DC. I liked him; he was friendly, sardonic, witty, and knew all the angles on the town. I remember that he called his first tumbler of scotch “The appetizer.” There was a first course, and a second course, and towards the end of the meal he held up his glass and said to the waiter: “And now dessert.”

Then he’s go back and write.

Those days came to an end, though. Lunchtime drinkers were people who juuuust might have a problem. I never had so much as a beer at lunch, because I get irritated at being schmoozled and tired at 2 PM. Just don’t drink enough to drink that much, if you know what I mean. So: what’s the romance of the office bottle?

Lou Grant, that’s what. Or who. I always wanted to work for Lou Grant. For
one thing, the show made it clear that Lou could hold his liquor. Two, there was a certain manly bonding element – even if you were named Mary – when Lou sat you down and pulled out the office bottle and laid out wisdom in the form of a war anecdote. It was ceremonial. In Mad Men the drinking is compulsive, habitual, rote – and the beauty of the show, among its other pleasures, is to show over the course of four years how something that seemed so bracing and outre to modern eyes is really quite sad. Unless you're Roger. He's probably the only character who can still pull off the character of the romantic alcoholic, without the tiresome Fitzgerald tragedy. The two great archetypes of the show are Don, the striving cipher, and Roger, who knows what he is, and knows he isn't much – but it doesn't really matter, because there's money enough, the securities of class, and the hard-fought knowledge that the hangover eventually lifts and a good stiff drink will still do its work. The romantic alcoholic, after all, is an optimist.

Anyway, there's a can of Diet Coke in my drawer. When I went back to office hours I laid in a supply of Diet Cokes and microwavable shelf-stable meals. There's lots of stuff in the drawer, and I looked at it today, and thought: everything must go. In my head or on my machine, that's all I'm going to carry here. A clean desk and empty drawers, and I'm happy. As I said: cold. Stupid cold. But after I worked out I went outside and wrote a Joe Ohio story. The last episode seemed to suggest a mystery, and as it turned out, there is a mystery. It's difficult within the limits of the form to develop plots and arcs, because as you know the matchbooks determine the stories. It's so I Ching. But it can be done without forcing matters, the latest installment came as a wonderful surprise. I have to follow the rules: no preselecting the matchbooks, no viewing of the matchbook before I start, 30 minutes to write, one revision. But I had to break one rule tonight, and it's worth it.

Pricing will be about 50 cents a chapter, with 50 chapters total in Volume 2. If you doubt the appeal of this project, consider this comment I found in the pending:

shalom I unquestionably ardor this blog post on The Return of Joe Ohio – The Bleat.. My name is Gia Tri, can we swap links?

Yeah, I think the market's huge. Anyway: that was the day. It began with madness: we were walking through the living room this morning to head to the bus, and I thought I’d be cruel and say BUS! as I looked through the window, but no, you can't cry wolf. Then I looked through the window and saw it: BUS! EARLY! I ran down the hill shouting and waving my hands, and as my daughter said later “the kids on the bus must have thought you looked like a total idiot.”

But did they say anything?

Well, no, because they're all kindergarteners.
These are the new foes: the bus is infested with kindergarteners who do not know they have no right to occupy the back of the bus. She's too old for this. When she came home at the end of the day and was tired and complaining about the bus, I asked if she'd like some hot chocolate. She did. I reached in the cabinet, and brought out the office bottle. In powder form. It's all ceremony.

Your daily updates – two, in fact – can be found over at Flotsam! Or, if you object to this whole back-up-blog-with-update-updates idea, hang on, and I'll post them here around noon. Tumblr should be up around noon as well, and of course PopCrush and the noon video and blah, blah, FARGIN' BLAH, and so on. Have a grand day. Hope it's warmer than mine.

41 RESPONSES TO ah, there you are

Dean says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:54 am

When I started working in 1986 many of the older staff (older – like in their 40′s!) had a bottle in the desk drawer – at 5:00, they'd put that bottle on the desk, pour themselves a wee dram, and keep on working late into the evening. Seems way more civilized than popping a Red Bull.

They'd also light up a cigarette INSIDE THE BUILDING! The beginning of the end was the distribution of those ashtrays with the battery-powered fan that supposedly sucked the smoke down into a charcoal filter but actually did nothing but make an annoying hum. Soon after that, no more smoking and no more boozing.

wiredog says:
September 8, 2010 at 6:52 am

Still hot here in DC. Hit 90 yesterday. But a Cold Front is Coming.

As long as it stays reasonably warm through this weekend in Ocean City, for the last Beach Weekend of the year. One more day of surfing followed by laying out in the sun, then Dumser's Ice Cream (I'm such a Rebel!) in the evening.

Sunday we clean the house and shut it down for the winter. Except for occasional weekend getaways with the Significant Other. But that's not Going to the Beach.

And later today, closing on the new condo. Which is why I'm here instead of at work.

andjetsam says:
September 8, 2010 at 7:02 am

Good day to you, Mr. Lileks! I am loving the Flotsam thing- the
Institute can be like a riddle inside a puzzle wrapped in an enigma when it comes to updates (to bastardize something Oliver Stonish) so I Like. Per the blog, I agree with your take on the “office bottle” and have struggled myself with maintaining said lifestyle with similar effects. The thing you don’t emphasize is that it is in no way a 9-5 operation, it doesn’t work at all that way. It is more similar to some So-Cal hippy programmer job when you could be just as easily be working hard at 7am as 7pm, though the day might be punctuated by the occasional bong-hit. Like you and Flotsam, it also has my full support. Cheers from the 80 something degreed EU!

kc says:
September 8, 2010 at 7:28 am

Waiting impatiently for cooler weather. It DOES finally get into the 70's overnight...but heats up again, with miserable humidity, by 9. Ick. This interminable summer that gets advertised to those who are about to retire? It's for the birds. I spend 4 months of the year here waiting for it NOT to be summer.

Then again, if that's the only thing really 'wrong' with my life, I'd say I've got it pretty good!

Maharincess of Franistan says:
September 8, 2010 at 7:35 am

When I joined the PR department of a major NYC bank in 1973, the head of the department would always come back from lunch, go into his office and lock the door for an hour. Nap time! (Luckily for him, his was not a glass-walled office.) When he retired, his successor (his former deputy) took over the office — and the locked-door practice. Both guys were former newspapermen, if that makes any difference.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 8, 2010 at 8:23 am

Strictly caffeine fueled here, as it has ever been. However, I do consume it in Mad Men-esque fashion. Caffeine-aholic? Most likely.

Welcome back Joe Ohio!

76 degrees and isolated thunder storms here today. It really is like someone threw a switch.

Lars Walker says:
September 8, 2010 at 8:55 am

It seems to me that the Office Bottle summons up Hammet and Chandler most of all. When you’ve been beaten up by a couple of goons and shot at by a crooked cop, and stumbled into through the foyer at last, an office bottle provides both spiritual solace and a handy source of disinfectant.

So I think a Joe Ohio mystery will suit me just fine.

Brisko says:
September 8, 2010 at 9:06 am

RE: NoDak towns.

There are a ton of old buildings in the cities and towns in my area
with the second story windows bricked up, and I have never understood it. When I was younger, I thought it was a bizarre architectural trend that must have been invented by a crazy person. Now I just wonder what is up there that is so special that it must be protected (or imprisoned, perhaps?) by bricks rather than glass.

GardenStater says:
September 8, 2010 at 9:14 am

@Dean: I started my work life in NYC in 1983, in a small in-house creative agency for a large magazine publishing company. I was a happy participant in the steak-and-booze, 2-hour lunch hour. In fact, we would be told by the boss that we weren't spending enough on our expense accounts, and that we needed to take our co-workers out to lunch more often.

Seems like we were able to get a lot more done back then, and it was more creative. We were able to keep it up until the late 90s, which is (I suppose) when most of the Mad Men generation retired to their country homes. Then it was no more smoking, no more booze.

I miss those days. Even though I'm not a smoker.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 8, 2010 at 10:29 am

Drinking at work sounds seems like another tool to separate the men from the boys.

swschrad says:
September 8, 2010 at 10:39 am

where I grew up, the office bottle made for a way sucky newscast. those newscasts fed 60+ families all on their own. the other 40 were paid on all the other business at the station.

there were indeed a few dismissals over it. in the 50s and 60s.

in present circumstances, we have had the occasional fellow who would come in dragging and by 10 am would be slack-jawed backwards in his chair, smelling like midnight in the hollers. two trips to PeeCity and out. generally recidivists.

so I haven't seen too many office bottles. other than Dew. and of course, the empties a quarter full of spent chaw.

-0-

cross-silo: cooking the pasta 14 minutes for the toothless. this invokes the blind fear of that murderous gangster, Al Dente. only thing worse is the Tong butcher Li Sing.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 8, 2010 at 10:41 am

Yeah, well maybe drinking does kill brain cells, but only the WEAK ones.

This may border on the risky, but the Lou Grant reference with the bottle and the war story reminded me of something. I first heard it in a radio interview and then later thought back over what I knew from my own experiences with veteran co-workers, which was about 70% of them, and my Dad. The author being interviewed put
forth the premise that drinking was a way of dealing with PTSD among many veterans. He went so far as to say that it was why the VFW's all have bars in them to facilitate a safe haven for those struggling without benefit or desire to seek professional help, but rather self medication. I seem to recall also that this was mentioned once in passing by Capt. Dale Dye USMC-Ret. during one of his interviews.

It makes me wonder how much of the drinking seen in Mad Men (and the entire era) is part of the same phenomenon. I do know that men in WW II seldom talked of it, buttoned it up tight, and buried it deep. Sooner or later that can build up and manifest itself in some less desirable activities.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 8, 2010 at 10:45 am

I worked with a middle aged man that everyone loved. We all knew that he drank like a fish the minute he got home from work (and he lived a short walk from work).

He retired early at age 55 and drank himself to death within 6 months.

I wonder how long he would have lived if he got to drink at work?

DensityDuck says:
September 8, 2010 at 11:25 am

I amour the Ohio of Joe.

Mr_Hat says:
September 8, 2010 at 11:55 am

I'd gladly trade a decade or so of my three-score-and-ten for drinking at work, were there a way to make such a trade.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 8, 2010 at 12:06 pm

@Mr_Hat, actually you are on to something, I think my late colleague did die happy or, at least had no clue that it was coming.

Renee V. says:
September 8, 2010 at 12:14 pm

Maybe I missed something, but how does one subscribe to the new and improved "Joe Ohio"?

Brisko says:
September 8, 2010 at 12:19 pm

@ Renee V You don't yet, I believe. It's going to be some sort of eBook format, as mentioned a couple weeks ago.

swschrad says:
September 8, 2010 at 12:23 pm

@Mark E Hurling: sir, you are on to something here. very seldom did Dad talk about the war, but he would occasionally come home
and start working the phones for somebody who needed, desperately needed, dental work 5 years ago. or needed a doctor. or needed counselling.

tonight.

despite the quality of dental work available today they just couldn’t afford it.

these connections were made at the Legion or the VFW when he occasionally stopped in. one trick of the wired newsman is to keep working the crowd, asking how things are going.

and these calls were invariably prompted when a guy finally opened up about how it all started south after combat.

you pulled it together and ran a wild liberty, because the alternative was “unfit for duty, psychological.”

something lower than shooting yourself in the leg. hell, there were lots of folks to do that for you.

DryOwlTacos says:
September 8, 2010 at 12:24 pm

“A clean desk and empty drawers, and I'm happy.”

When you get to a certain age, you appreciate those things even more.

swschrad says:
September 8, 2010 at 12:24 pm

@MEH: oh, the bars. they also kept the clubs open. the revenue was vital.

Hal says:
September 8, 2010 at 12:56 pm

A small dot-com firm I worked at two years ago had a company fridge filled with a variety of beers, available to all after 5pm. The locked cupboard in the break room, filled with hard liquor, was opened for company parties. A number of workers had drunk driving arrests and one of my team was serving 60 days for a third drunk & disorderly conviction. I didn't stay there long.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:03 pm

@hal, sounds a great way to reduce staff with out messy layoffs 😊

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:07 pm

@swschrad, I hadn't thought about the economic angle for funding the VFW. Dad didn't go to the VFW often, I don't know why. He preferred the Papineau Coliseum, a bar right in town. I don't believe this phenomenon was unique to the Greatest Generation. Books on the Napoleonic Wars by both Cornwell (the land war) and O'Brian (the naval war) talk constantly about the drinking by the soldiers and sailors of the era even to the point of liquoring up right before and even during battles when they could. It's easy to dismiss their works as mere historical fiction, but both of them cite extensive research among the letters of the era for insights into how things actually were. The French Foreign Legion has no disciplinary charge
for drunk on duty, merely one for unfit for duty that does not cover intoxication, so it appears to not be confined to anglophones.

fizzbin says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:08 pm

@Mark E. Hurling: you and the author are spot on about one of the functions of VFWs, etc. There's nothing like being among your own in order to maintain some semblance of sanity. I never had a job where it was routine to drink on the Man's time (nutz). When climbing telephone poles, operating machines, etc, it's best to be in control of one's faculties, heh.

An uncle of mine was a Naval Aviator in the PTO. He never talked about his experiences, certainly not to his kids. His civilian job was very much like the Mad Men show.

Ah, Cap'n Dye, I really like what he put Carlie Sheen through for Platoon 😄

I worked a lot of DWI enforcement (so many stories, so little time) in the '70s-'80s (all time and a half, woo hoo) and it's interesting that toward the late '70s, attitudes toward alcohol consumption started to change to the negative. This coincided with the beginning of retirements of WW 2 vets. First Responders know all too well the horror alcohol abuse causes, so the rejection of the Mad Men lifestyle is a good thing.

Dookie, now I'm hungry for filet mignon and copious amounts of Canadian Mist 😁

swschrad says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:15 pm

@Mark E Hurling: they don't call that warm brew “John Courage” for nothing in ol’ Blighty.

I suspect being three sheets to the wind doesn't matter much when it's cutlasses and daggers, if you're slicing each others beards, you're accurate enough. probably good enough for broadsides, too, there's no aiming needed.

modern weaponry, not so much. it's useful to have your lock-on laser steady on the right target. drunk and stoned is no way to pilot a Predator.

which of course brings up the history of the assassins. again, the ancient version of the semi-guided missle, without the availability of Cheetos as a distraction.

GardenStater says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:18 pm

@Hal: “A small dot-com firm I worked at two years ago had a company fridge filled with a variety of beers, available to all after 5pm.”

Back in the early 90s, my boss actually assigned me to keep a fridge filled with sodas, iced tea, and beer. After 5:00, we'd crack open a cold one and keep working.

Of course, when you're in Manhattan, either you take a subway or cab home or get on a bus or train back to the suburbs. No risk of DWI, really.
fizzbin says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:19 pm

@swschard: aaaaah, in Da Big Nam we would have KILLED for Cheetos!!!! Oh, wait, we did…but we never did get our Cheetos 😊

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:21 pm

@fizzbin, I actually pulled over a member of the royal family of Qatar for DWI. He was driving a Firebird (of course) and was really hammered. He had an international driver's license to boot that had no validity at all in the good ole' U.S. of A. Oh and did I mention diplomatic immunity? I really got blistered by the watch commander for not releasing him in a timely enough manner, even though he was still so drunk he had to drive; he was too drunk to walk.

fizzbin says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:23 pm

@MEH: Sophocles' Ajax deals with PTSD. It seems the price of war 'twas ever thus.

fizzbin says:
September 8, 2010 at 1:35 pm

@MEH: so, it was YOU who caused us all the trouble! I know, my time on The Thin Blue Line was before yours. Toward the end of my LEO time I was an FTO. The Feds sent us training material on “How To Kiss Diplomatic A**”, er, I mean, “How To Play Nice With Diplomats” or some such crep. It was a big hit at the shop, heh.

I never had contact with any of the Anointed Ones. My curse seemed to be Canadians. I was a veritable Kanuck magnet 😊

Chuck (other Chuck) says:
September 8, 2010 at 2:16 pm

The really dark side of drinking on the job. I known some retired (and a couple of current) railroaders. Drinking on the job was very commonplace in the 60s and 70s. They said the best thing to ever happen was a very nasty Amtrak accident in the NE. A drunk and high Conrail engineer ran a red light and killed a large number of Amtrak passengers when he hit their train. This prompted a crackdown and the rails have been much safer since.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 8, 2010 at 2:50 pm

@fizzbin, I was a LEO (although I'm actually a Virgo) in the 70's, so pretty close in time frame with you. They let me do the field training officer thing in terms of unarmed tactics for a while, until I got my photo taken putting a knee into someone's wedding tackle. They moved me to assist the sergeant in charge of the officer friendly program as punishment for getting caught. I got to carry his boxes of baloons and suckers for all those little F'ers for a few weeks while the bad publicity died down. I got bounced from that detail for reciting that little rhyming ditty mentioned above while loading
boxes in the parking lot one hot afternoon. The school's principal caught me at it and when I reported in for work the next day, the desk sgt. said; “Uh Hurling, Capt. Hogan wants to see you in his office upstairs.”

Which ironically lead me to my next gig, special agent for the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad, known affectionately to it's employees as CRIP. It may have been different on the East coast railroads, but in the Midwest they were sudden death on drinking on the job even in the 70's. The agents in Kansas City actually showed up at shift change with a breathalyzer. The legend goes that several brakemen and engineers suddenly called in sick from a phone booth across the street from the railyard when they saw and heard what was going on in the crew call room.

**Hal says:**
September 8, 2010 at 3:45 pm

Working in London was a bit of a shock for this US trained manager. My staff would often pop out for “a few pints” over a pub lunch and “quite a few” on Fridays. In the 90's it was the norm and many staff would drag through the afternoon at 50% effectiveness. The Aussies I managed were worse often citing a “powerful boozer” as a valid reason for being late and taking off at lunch on Fridays to get started on a pub crawl. The culture was such that none of this was cause for discipline. My staff in Amsterdam could even keep porn on thier work PC with impunity. Strange world.

**Steve says:**
September 8, 2010 at 8:12 pm

About 10 years ago a contact at a distributor of my company's products informed me that the donuts I brought them on my quarterly visits were nice, but quite frankly, everyone brought them donuts. What they wanted was BEER. So according to instruction, I showed up at 4:58PM (two minutes before they closed) at the back dock with two cases of the stuff that made Milwaukee famous and put it in the refrigerator in the warehouse (that was already about half full of beer). After 5, they buzzed me through the then locked front door as the salespeople (men and women but mostly men), managers, dock clerks, etc. enjoyed the beer that was rolled out on a stock picking cart. This went on each quarter for about six or so years. These days my company won’t allow us to buy booze for customers as there is too great a liability risk in buying people alcohol with company money.

**MJBirch says:**
September 8, 2010 at 9:18 pm

Chuck (other Chuck) was this the accident at Gunpowder, MD (just northeast of Baltimore)?

**Jenny says:**
September 8, 2010 at 11:47 pm

I think you have a way of making us all think you're inside our brain. But really: Yesterday my kindergartener came off the bus complaining that he’d tried to ride in the back and some older girls said he couldn’t. I told him they weren't in charge and that he could sit anywhere he wanted. Today he reported he told the girls that his
mom said he could ride in the back of the bus (!), but the girls again said he could not. I said, “What are you gonna do. Bossy girls.” And I gave him a nice, cold glass of whole milk, his favorite.

Apparently from Minnesota to Tennessee, kindergarteners cannot ride in the back of the bus.

Normie says:
September 9, 2010 at 2:46 pm

@ DryOwlTacos – Even more appreciated will be an empty desk and clean drawers...

lanczos says:
September 9, 2010 at 6:24 pm

Jenny: “Bossy [older] girls” Are there ‘any other kind’?

“And I gave him a nice, cold glass of whole milk, his favorite.”

When he's little older, it'll be a Glass Of Kentucky Bourbon. And he'll be totally justified...

dcmatthews says:
September 10, 2010 at 9:25 am

I can't hear (or read) “Ah, there you are” without hearing the voice of Paul Frees as the Haunted Mansion's Ghost Host finishing the speech: “...And just in time. There's a little matter I forgot to mention: BEWARE OF HITCHHIKING GHOSTS!”

Joni says:
September 14, 2010 at 8:00 am

Joe Ohio, YES. Don't care if the chapters cost a firstborn per, I WANT.
Potpourri today.

Child update: school is great except the younger kids on the bus are annoying. The most egregious sin: the third-graders have formed an alliance with the fourth-graders to undercut the authority of the outnumbered fifth-graders. What’s the point of being a fifth-grader if you can’t get some respect from the others? Daughter is appalled. Says she would never have made fun of fifth-graders when she was a fourth-grader.

KIDS TODAY.

Dog update: he was deeply concerned about the mailman today, and barked up a racket. He kept looking to me: do you know about this guy? Is this okay? I’m not sure. He’s gone but he could be back. Better bark more. BARK BARK BARK. Keep in mind that he’s about 105 years old, so it’s like a guy from the Guinness Book of World Records Oldest Man page jumping out of his rocker and cold-cocking the meter reader.

Big honking mess of a day, complicated by the latest installment in the defective dishwasher story. It worked again, then it didn’t, then it did, then it had the most unusual requests: I shall only wash on the china setting, and then I require a two-hour delay. I knew what the problem was: same as before. Defective controls. They short out. Turns out dishwashers involve
liquids. Back to the drawing board, lads! Anyway – and I’m drastically compressing a boring story of Consumer Strife – the new one arrived today.

*It didn’t fit.*

They’d said it was, because the old one was “European style,” as was the new one, but lo: it was too wide by 1/8th inch on either side, and apparently that’s now the new standard. So someone has to come and sand off the wood to get it in. At this point I honestly wanted to go outside with a crowbar and beat the old dishwasher into a twisted pile.

Busy day. Sunny but cool. I still hate, hate the sudden jolt of cold weather, especially at night. I’m waiting for Fall Happiness Season to kick in. The whole season-of-mists-and-mellow-fruitfulness crap, y’know?

Anyway. Did the Ricochet podcast this morning, a nice little five-way scrum over Skype, which is difficult for fluid conversation some times. The lag means everyone dives in at a certain point to take the floor, and then there’s verbal hugger mugger until someone seems insistent enough to pave over everyone else. This happens rarely, and it’s inevitable, but I find myself thinking never in a million years did I ever think I’d be trying to talk over Pat Sajak. (Who is a smart and effortlessly decent fellow, BTW.) At the end of the podcast I noted with no small amount of horror that I had, without thinking, arranged things on my desk while I spoke:

![Desk with items](image)

I have no memory of this. The shaver is on the desk because I grind it into my mug every morning while I scan the wires for things to write about. The long letter opener is from 1960 something, from the Harwood bank. The pen is one of those modern pens that does not write unless you use an envelope to scrawl something to convince the ink to flow. The pad of paper – and you can barely make it out – is a list of all the things I have to do this week, with boxes to be checked. My entire life is paperless except for The List. It gives me great satisfaction to make the list, and check off the boxes.

![Child 44 advertisement](image)
Other random images from the world: forgot to note that Wes the Filmmaker – actually, Professor Wes now, since he teaches film and TV production at a local private college – has a new old car.

Name that model! Something else I forgot to post from the grocery store:

So it's the ghosts from Pac-Man being gassed, right? There's Vomit Dots, Can't Handle The Trip Dots, O-Face Dots, OMG WTF Dots, and Cat-Rectum Dots. Got it.

**Something** I found today while looking for the opening credits for “Bonanza,” the creator of which died the other day: Johnny Cash singing the opening song.
When I was a kid I always wondered why the map burned up.

Something else I found while researching the name of a socialite who appeared in a 1935 cigarette ad: a photo of a sculptor named William Wetmore Story. What did the photographer say right before he pushed the button? “There's no more pudding. The pudding is all gone.”

Or perhaps something else: “You may work in pliant stone, sir, but God works in flesh, which is considerable more resistant to His chisel.” And the guy thought crap, he's right. There's something unsettled and annoyed in that expression. Perhaps he's contemplating the effect of photography on the medium of sculpture. Perhaps he has piles.

After yesterday's Mad-Men-related Bleat I watched the latest Mad Men. People had been saying it was the best ep of the season so far. Don't disagree. Jon Hamm, if nothing else, has raised the bar on the art of playing a drunk; we're so used to his stoic cold Don Draper we may not notice how well he impersonates the various stages of intoxication. In the end the show's about
him and Peggy, I guess; one archetype on the descent, another on the way up. It's all about the intersection of the two trajectories.

And now some TV. If you went to Flotsam you'd find the link for today's update, and maybe I should just MAKE YOU. But that's the backstop. Here you go: 30s ads. Tomorrow? A veritable bonanza. Have a grand day!

62 RESPONSES TO *wrong ain’t got a chance*

**Vladimir** says:
September 9, 2010 at 1:46 pm

Way back I had an elderly Hungarian relative who loved Bonanza. But he always pronounced it Bon-zana. That cracked us up….

**E** says:
September 9, 2010 at 2:18 pm

Mrs William T Wetmore!


**swschrad** says:
September 9, 2010 at 2:47 pm

@Vladimir: wonder what the lyrics would sound like in Hungarian?

probably “Doo wa diddy diddy dum diddy do.”

yes, that's a zyk joke.

**Mike** says:
September 9, 2010 at 4:58 pm

There is a nice collection of special features on the Bonanza dvd set, one of which is the story of the map. David Dortort, the producer of
the show, had his art director paint the map and realized, too late,
that the geography was wrong. So he had the compass rose added to
indicate the correct orientation. The fictional Ponderosa was
actually on the east shore of Lake Tahoe, not the north shore.
Either way, that's some valuable real estate!

**PatchtheBun** says:
September 9, 2010 at 6:01 pm

Am I the only one who sees a “Tauts belly wrap” ad on the side?
Does the interwebz someone know I might be in the market for such
a thing in about 3 months?
This is pretty much the last place I expect to find an ad like that.

**PatchtheBun** says:
September 9, 2010 at 6:01 pm

somehow, not someone.

**lanczos** says:
September 9, 2010 at 6:11 pm

Ahhh, Jimmy, ya' wimp! We're so disappointed in you:

“Feeling low,
Feeling tense,
These eight words are Common Sense:
Smoke A Lucky, To Feel Your Level Best!
Smoke A Lucky, To Feel Your Level Best!
Yes, To feel your Level Best, Smoke A Lucky
Because Lucky's fine tobacco picks you up when you're low,
Calms you down when you're tense.
Puts You On The Right Level To Feel And Do Your LEVEL BEST!
That's what Fine Tobacco can Do For You!”

I have this on The Highest Authority: Jack Benny's CBS Radio Show,
Apr 7, 1949.

And Remember:
“LS/MFT -
LS/MFT -
Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco!”

**SCOTTtheBADGER** says:
September 9, 2010 at 8:29 pm

My Grandpa Lind had a black Falcon, while my first car was a
Nightmist Blue 1967 Mustang Fastback, with a 289 HiPo. That car
could pass anything but a gas pump.

**Bill** says:
September 9, 2010 at 9:55 pm

I tweeted this, but European dishwashers are 60 cm wide, US
dishwashers are 24”.

Kitchen installers are supposed to leave a 24” opening and
accordingly European DW makers sell filler strips to cover the wider
gap.

Things get confusing with brands like Bosch, which is European but
their US market models are actually made in the US so are 24” wide,
not 60 cm like brands like Asko and Miele.

RWH says:
September 10, 2010 at 4:26 pm

Yes, the unconventional orientation of the Ponderosa map didn’t strike me until I moved out to Nevada and noticed that for some reason Virginia City and Carson City were shown as “north” of Lake Tahoe. (The orientation of the map tends to be more in the “TV Screen format” that a geographically correct version.) Not to get all “trekkie serious” about this, but it would be interesting to find out what kind of back story they came up to explain how the Cartwright family could come up with that much private land in a state that’s mostly run by the BLM these days.

razorbacker says:
September 14, 2010 at 12:36 am

Professor Wes bought himself a Ford Falcon, I guess. Probably a 1960 model.

You do realize that I can’t tell one new car from another, don’t you?
The things that stick in your head for 50 years can be unsettling.

jaime says:
September 14, 2010 at 12:50 pm

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?
Russian Dude may have Problems

How can the third day of a four-day week seem like the sixth day of five-day week?

But it was exactly that. Didn’t feel like Thursday at all. But I promised a Link Bonanza, and I will provide. I hope this makes up for the lack of Bletage here. Because believe me, nothing happened today worth discussing, except maybe my daughter’s recitation of a plot of a book she was reading. She gave me every – single – detail, hopping around on the sofa as she did so, occasionally irritated when I tried to cut to the chase.

“So this guy he’s the villain? But everyone thinks he’s like a good guy and he makes these computers and sends them to schools.”

“But they’re really programmed to do something evil.” For context: while she’s hopping around the sofa, I’m stepping UP and down and UP and down on my board for exercise.

“Well I’ll GET to that, okay, and so then they’re unloading some crates from a submarine that came out of the ocean.”

“As opposed to the ones that fly out of the sky.”

“DAD. And there’s an evil Russian dude, and one of the guys unloading the
boxes drops one, and he says he won’t make that mistake again, and the Russian dude shoots him and says no you won’t. So the hero realizes these aren’t ordinary guys unloading things because you wouldn’t shoot someone who dropped a box unless you have, you know, problems.”

And so on. It sounds like an interesting book, and quite plausible; I’m sure most spy organizations react to the execution of their top agent by recruiting his 15-year old nephew to continue his mission. Daughter says it’s not impossible or unlikely because he knows karate.

Then we practiced piano: she is learning Eine Kliene Nachtmusik, and I spent some time trying to make it sound like the left hand wasn’t jackhammering Mozart’s crypt

Dog news: he did well on his walk today. Always like to see the constant steady gait. Had an unusual moment when he stared down a dog across the street, which is also heartening; means he hasn’t entered the end-game senescent phase where he couldn’t care less who wanders over and pees on his domain.

Fall update: another cold dim day. I don’t want to talk about it. Except that I obviously do, because it’s part of the conversation on the Diner. Yes! A Diner. And more. Remember, Flotsam has your update links. But since you’re here:

Diner.


Gallery of Regrettable Food: ten new covers.

And 100 Mysteries #92.

And the Startribune column, on fall. Scroll down, it’s there somewhere. My daily video up at noon at the same site, too.

There. Whew. Done. And now, Friday, with no late night for me: I agreed to be on a blogging panel that convenes at 9 AM Saturday morning. Madness! Nevertheless I’ll have a grand weekend. You have one too.
54 RESPONSES TO russiaN dudE maY hAvE problems

Jan says:
September 10, 2010 at 6:34 pm

The presence of celery may explain the confused-bemused look on the face of the salad-making gal in the Yacht Club Dressing ad. Has James discovered a very early Frahm from a more demure era when underwear was implied but not shown?

lanczos says:
September 10, 2010 at 6:36 pm

Sir: Re: Rock Baby, Rock It: The “Crazy, Crazy Lovin’”, The “Wild, Wild Women”; The “Sugar Baby!” Where Do I Go To “Dig It NOW”? And those Belew Twins: Are they 13 or 14 years old? But don’t they ROCK?/b?

Mary says:
September 10, 2010 at 7:02 pm

Re: the covers- I have a copy of that Scandinavian cookbook! And a bunch of the rest of that series. Shades of my childhood…

Ed says:
September 10, 2010 at 11:32 pm

James, will you be putting the Diner back on iTunes as a subscription? It was great having them show up in iTunes as soon as they were available.
100 mysteries rocks today! plus, didn't anyone ever tell that guy that shoulder harness will pull out your chest hair if you forget your shirt!

Yow!

 kok 

UNTOLD RICHES AWAIT YOU

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

BLEAT PREMIUM

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

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
StarTribune Column

ARCHIVES

All entries, chronologically...

July 2013
June 2013
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October 2012
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August 2012
developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
I do not like to get up Saturday mornings. I believe it is a man's right to wake late, mutter over some coffee, rub his hand over his unshaven face, and do farg-all until noon, after which is wife is permitted to hand him a list of chores. I know some husbands bound out of bed at the break of dawn, eager to get as much out of the free day as possible, but I prefer to take it in advance, and stay up as late as possible. Given my druthers my hours of engagement with the world are 8 AM to 2 AM with a solid hour of restorative unconsciousness somewhere in the middle. But Saturday morning I want a big slab of nine hours in REM sleep so REMy my eyelids are worn translucent by all the rapid eye-movement.

So I was disappointed to find out I was supposed to speak on a panel at 9 AM, in St. Paul. With travel time and waking up this meant I'd have to go to bed early. I tried. Really, I tried; I got all my work in early, and tried to shut off my brain, but I ended up rising with a head full of glue and no idea what I was going to say. Poured a go-cup of coffee and headed out. Got to St. Paul a bit early, spent half an hour trying to find a parking spot (the streets around the conference location were torn up, and there were no parking spots available on the street. I've never been able to figure this out. When I worked downtown St. Paul you couldn't find a human on street at high noon, but every spot was taken. Worse on a Saturday morning. Eventually I found a spot under a sign that said meters were enforced every day except Sunday. “Courtesy Hours.” So the other hours were rude, insulting hours, then. Who to believe?
I took a picture of the meter at my car in case I would have to plead my case in court, and wandered through an alley to get to my destination.

A very old building, very old cobblestones: this could be Rome.

I got upstairs, saw the room – lots of people – and noticed someone was on stage, talking, and there were other people on stage in chairs, waiting. There was one empty chair. Hmm. There was a fighting chance I was supposed to be up there, and indeed that was so – but it had just begun. I looked around for coffee, and didn’t see any. Sigh. We’re going to have to do this on fumes, then.

It was a blogging convention, and if you’re curious, here is the video.
Then I went to the absolute other side of town to get new lens for my glasses, thinking: a fellow can be rather productive if he gets up early enough. I kind of like this. I could walk around the mall for exercise, go to Denny's for breakfast – NO! NO! STOP! I had another pair of glasses to wear while they replaced the lens, and since it took an hour I did all the weekend shopping, including a trip to the Edina Liquor Store for some Edina Liquor. Feels rather skeezy buying wine at 11:00 AM.

Back at the Apple Store, I considered buying Quicken. I know, I know: the excitement never stops. But I've been looking for finance software, playing with everything out there. Someone recommended Moneydance, but I cannot run a program whose website has this guy:

Who is this supposed to appeal to? Really? I tried another one that seemed full-featured but dull, and another that seemed adequate but had an icon I
hated, one that didn’t seem to do anything but duplicate the bank’s website, and one called iCash. More expensive than Quicken, but it lets me assign custom icons to nearly everything in your transaction report. That seems to seal the deal, since going into the monthly reports, assigning icons, giving the transactions tags, provides the illusion of financial planning without any depressing realities. I think you can set it up so it deliberately refuses to tell you how much you spent on a particular category. So there’s that. On the other hand, Quicken has enormous colorful pie charts. I’m still torn.

**Back home:** worked a bit on the Spry overhaul. It’s a piece of the old Gallery of Regrettable Food that goes back to 1996, and it’s so archaic; truly designed for dial-up. The new version is gorgeous and has many added pages and some surprising features. As you’ll see.

In the evening we went to the 9/11 Memorial Service at the lake, which I wrote about here. Another reminder how beautiful this city is. Walk past the streetcar, which still runs . . .

. . . down the hill to the lake . . .
... to the bandshell.
That night I watched “The Book of Eli,” which I liked, and was surprised to find was directed by the Hudson Brothers and featured the Singing Detective as well as Commissioner Gordon. Then bed, and lots of it.

**Sunday** I painted a shed. This meant getting a scraper and some sandpaper and making a big production out of doing something around the house, as if the job wasn’t slapping paint on a small building but spending seven years on my back delineating the iconic stories of the predominant belief-system. And now I have to write another magazine column. Back in a bit.

BACK

Worst night ever. As I will describe tomorrow. Hope to get the updates up at noon, so stop back – or check Flotsam. See you around.
Dave (in MA) says:
September 13, 2010 at 1:41 am

Worst night ever. As I will describe tomorrow.

I hope that's hyperbole. 😊

Terry says:
September 13, 2010 at 2:23 am

I watched the video of the blogger-con. The female announcers looked like they were trying to imitate lesbians. Also, although they seemed to be educated, they pronounced the word “for” as “fur”. Perhaps they were being “ironic”?

Soozcat says:
September 13, 2010 at 2:25 am

Quicken 98 has handled and continues to handle our finances, far longer than its likely-intended shelf life. As they say, it ain't broke, and happily neither are we.

Take that, planned obsolescence!

Soozcat says:
September 13, 2010 at 2:54 am

Also also wik: I just skimmed over the blogging conference video, and the comment about “You're never alone on the Internet” is spot-on.

That same phenomenon also tends to create unreasonable illusions about what normalcy is. No matter what weird quirk or personal pecadillo you might have — a fetish for left-handed cold-blooded long-nosed green-skinned forensic entomologists from Belarus — you're frighteningly likely to find at least fifty people with Internet access who share it. And that tends to make people believe that their personal oddities, whatever they might be, are perfectly normal and reasonable interests... when perhaps they are not.

I expect I'll be dodging tomatoes from the forensic entomologist fanciers for a while, but oh well.

Obi-Wandreas says:
September 13, 2010 at 5:31 am

I'm still using Quicken 2004. I tried using iBank, and actually bought it before I noticed one idiotic oversight – there's no way to input your credit limit on any cards so that it constantly shows you how much space is left. I figured that would be obvious, but apparently most other companies have made the same idiotic oversight. So, I keep using Quicken like it's the only car on the market that has a fuel gauge.

Chris says:
September 13, 2010 at 5:57 am

That balding guy sitting in front of the bandstand is in for some real
painless. I've never seen a scalp that badly sunburned.

**Pencilpal** says:
September 13, 2010 at 7:04 am

My husband's aunt, a former real estate agent, lived in Edina before moving to her retirement community. On our trip out to see her a few years ago she directed my husband's driving to all the highlights of your lovely twin cities, meticulously pointing out every duplex she'd ever sold along the way, often rattling off several remembered amenities of each. She'd probably have a hoot comparing notes with the realtor blogger on your panel, and I'm sure the blogger would gather plenty of ideas for posts from a bubbly, chatty, 92-year-old former WAC.

**ExGeeEye** says:
September 13, 2010 at 7:49 am

Quicken.

Best thing I ever did for my personal finances.

Most worthwhile thing I do with my computer, as well.

Not the most fun…but some things I don't do for fun, but because I must…and those things, to my mind, are best done quickly.

Thus, Quicken.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
September 13, 2010 at 7:52 am

Sorry to hear about Ace: Tough to balance, that Circle of Life stuff, and children.

We instead spent Saturday at two soccer games, 8:00AM & 10:30AM then a race home to prepare for the 2:00PM birthday party for the about to be six year old. Then, party clingers well past the 4:30PM end time, and finally a late evening trip with Fred and Ethel and their two similarly aged kidlings for dinner out at a Japanese place that the kids love! In between activities during the course of the day, I triggered tweets for some Project2996.com tributes I had previously posted. Sunday was lost to me, but it must have ended better than James’ Sunday.

It seems that it is easier to clean up after a teenage kegger party, than a six year old's birthday party.

I hope that the grief is short lived. Regardless, best of luck in dealing with the sorrow, and happy smiles for the special memories of Ace.

**RPD** says:
September 13, 2010 at 8:04 am

Personal finances? Paper and pen baby! Never crashes. I guess the key is being able to simplify to the point that I wouldn't know what to use a Quicken program for.

**rbj** says:
September 13, 2010 at 8:30 am

Got Quicken 2001(?) I actually did have an earlier version then
upgraded one year for some odd reason. Never had the need to upgrade again.

I try and sleep in on the weekends, and dog #1 agrees with that, but the spare emergency back up dog needs to go out in the a.m.

**Blar** says:
September 13, 2010 at 9:07 am

We use Mint.com. It’s free, has neat colorful graphs, and if you have your bank and credit accounts wired, will sort purchases and other transactions automatically. You do have to give them all your bank and credit card numbers to make it work, which is bound to make some people nervous.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
September 13, 2010 at 9:12 am

Upon further review, the Streetcar photo looks like it’s right out of Thomas The Tank Engine. I should know, as I have some experience in causing “confusion, and delay”. Plus my 9 year old used to watch the Thomas tapes and DVDs as hand me downs from her older cousin.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:
September 13, 2010 at 10:05 am

Good to see that streetcars like that still are in active use. Having worked for railroads during the course of quite a varied career, once the rails get in your blood, it stays there forever.

**bgbear (roger h)** says:
September 13, 2010 at 10:32 am

Stock photo people always look too happy, maniacally happy like they are wearing the “happy helmet” from Ren & Stimpy.

**swschrad** says:
September 13, 2010 at 10:36 am

had to make a speed run to Fargo Saturday. got mom's estate house sold, as they say, *pending*.

this pending was to make a little change in the way the water heater relief valve's outflow pipe was located. done.

a 90 year old house, and we were really sweating the buyer's home inspection. are they going to demand a new roof? replace the drain stack? furnace? replace all the windows? flip all the carpet upside down and refasten it because the dog wants to sharpen his claws?

thank God, no. please to make a minor change to the water heater. that's worth doing 480 miles and three trips to the hardware store (the heater shutoff valve needed attention.)

**Rubo** says:
September 13, 2010 at 10:54 am

Ace?? Is this the hamster/gerbil?
juanito - John Davey says:
September 13, 2010 at 11:12 am

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 13, 2010 at 10:32 am

Stock photo people always look too happy, maniacally happy like they are wearing the “happy helmet” from Ren & Stimpy.

Wouldn’t that be the “Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy Helmet”?

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 13, 2010 at 11:24 am

I’ll teach you to be happy!

Chris says:
September 13, 2010 at 11:33 am

I saw a street car like that Kenosha, WI that was “in use”, but I’m pretty sure that everyone on it was a tourist. We had “broasted” chicken that night; something that I don’t think you’ll find outside the midwest.

ech says:
September 13, 2010 at 11:50 am

Sunday I painted a shed.

If you get another one, we can get Hugh to introduce you as James “Two Sheds” Lileks!

Upsides to Quicken: works well, integrates with our bank and credit cards to download transactions, reconciliation of statements is therefore a snap, makes doing the taxes much easier (once you have the categories set up well), reminders will tell you when bills need to be paid and if you missed a regular bill.

Downside: They now make versions obsolete after a few years and they no longer will download transactions, forcing an upgrade. But at $35-ish every 2-3 years, its a bargain.

GardenStater says:
September 13, 2010 at 11:58 am

Sorry to hear about Ace. But better he goes first, for Natalie’s sake. She’ll be (slightly) more prepared for the sad, inevitable day when Jasper goes to his reward.

MikeH says:
September 13, 2010 at 12:29 pm

Forgot about Ace, very little has been mentioned of him lately. Sometimes though you can get a replacement hamster without letting the caretaker know.

swschrad says:
September 13, 2010 at 12:47 pm
sold, pending pshaw, sold PERIOD, they changed the sign.

painting sheds is not terrible.

tearing out the end walls and rebuilding them to get rid of the rot, now that's work. even more so if you jack it up, put it on cross-beams pillars, and put a foundation under it, too.

Charlie Young says:
September 13, 2010 at 1:12 pm

If you really want a version of Quicken, don't get the Mac version. What a mess. Buy the Windows version and install on your Boot Camp version of Windows.

Bob_R says:
September 13, 2010 at 3:18 pm

All of the Amazon reviews of the Mac version of Quicken say it's horrible. I've been using Money on a PC for years. It's no longer being supported and my main computer is now a Mac. I'd rather go with a native Mac version of some financial software, but I'm worried about Quicken.

Ed Singel says:
September 13, 2010 at 4:59 pm

I use Quicken for PC on my Mac using a Parallels Desktop virtual machine window. Works just fine, and allows me to continue to use my Mac apps at the same time.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 13, 2010 at 5:51 pm

James' post about the 9/11 memorial event in Minneapolis can be find at Ricochet: http://ricochet.com/content/view/full/24193

Daniel says:
September 13, 2010 at 6:54 pm

“Who is this supposed to appeal to? Really?,” James asked. Answer: one-legged couples who enter three-legged races at the beach.

Moishe3rd says:
September 14, 2010 at 8:56 am

“Book of Eli”
I thought that was a great movie. All the great heroic slam bam action good guy vs evil with plot twists that I could hope for. Fine flick. And then, as an Orthodox Jew, at the final denouement moment of the movie, as they were shelving “the book,” I burst out laughing and realized that Eli's whole mystical journey was totally pointless... Oy. Sigh... Either the producer is totally clueless or, it was a deliberate poke in the eye to those who are actually so silly as to enjoy a movie where the idea of G-d is a focal point...
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A few highly recommended friends...

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1: Matchbook Museum
2: Comic Covers
3: Black & White World
4: Sears 1934
5: Comic ads
6: 100 Mysteries
Institute of Official Cheer
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Shorpy.com
StarTribune Column

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.

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Sorry I didn't get the updates out – noon came and noon was loud and full of things I had to do, and then I left the house, and it was all typing and talking from then until the funeral.

As you may have noted on the Twitter feed, Ace the hamster was found dead last night. It was horrible for Natalie, just horrible. I heard the wailing from outside, and walked around the side of the house below her room, wondering if someone was skinning a cat, and by the time I got to the steps to go inside to see what was wrong – argument with Mommy over tomorrow's clothes? Hurt feelings on the internet? – she was in the kitchen, sobbing: ACE IS DEAD.
And he was. Dead as a dormouse. A little furry comma curled up in his bedding.

HE’S COLD, she sobbed. So there were consoling hugs and platitudes and all the things you do, except I didn’t say “It’ll be all right.” They say that in Dragnet when they tell a wife her husband is dead. Stupidest thing Joe Friday ever says: “it’ll be all right.” Or “take it easy.” I suppose there’s something to be said for saying something, anything that admits the possibility the worst will pass and a new normal settle in, but it just seems the opposite of the truth at the moment. After a while I said we would get a new one, and while it wouldn’t be Ace, it would–

“I don’t want another hamster,” she sobbed. “It would just die.”

Well, she has a point.

But what happened? my wife wanted to know. He wasn’t old. Did he suffocate? Did he starve? I said it was unlikely he starved, since he had a full bowl of food. But he liked those crackers we gave him. Maybe he was holding out. Perhaps, but I don’t think there’s an animal on the planet that would ignore a full bowl of seeds and nuts and other items specifically aimed at the hamster gullet, because he was holding out for a Cheez-It. Could you look on the internet? I said I could.

Of course, there’s nothing useful, just those sites where people ask questions and other people answer them. Why did my hamster die? was a common question, it seems. The answer usually boiled down to “because it’s a hamster. Also, this is the way of all flesh. But mostly because it’s a hamster.” I learned they are prone to cardiac degeneration, which probably happens rarely in the wild because they’re eaten much earlier on.

One page said hamsters sometimes go into hibernation and you think they’re dead, but then their whiskers twitch. I was pretty sure this wasn’t the case, but checked: no.

She was sad the rest of the night, as you can well imagine. I took him out of his cage and put him in a plastic container that had previously held smoked turkey, and put him in my room under a pot of flowers. As if this was the viewing. Then I took the cage out of her room, which left a big empty spot on her dresser, and that was the worst of all, again.

Not that this matters, but 5 minutes before this began I had started to write a piece for National Review that was due the next day, and this had the effect of blowing an enormous hole in the ol’ let’s-write-some-hardy-har-funny-stuff. Got back to it about two hours later, and found it therapeutic. But I was too
tired to post the links and I just wanted to go to bed. So I did.

When she came home from school today she wanted to have the funeral right away. She picked out a spot in the backyard as far as possible from the house, under some bushes, with flowers. I got a spade and turned the earth. Went upstairs. Got the plastic casket. I gave it to her, and she took him out and held him for a while and stroked his fur as the tears rolled down her cheek. Then she laid him in the earth, and I put a paper napkin over him and put back the dirt and laid the turf over the hole, and we stood there for a while. I said a few words, because that's what you do; that's what humans do. Shape wind into meaning when things go.

Then she went inside and cried.

After a while she wanted to just sit in front of the TV, which is rare. Sure. She got her favorite blanket and a few stuffed animals and I said maybe after dinner we could have some ice cream with those new Halloween Oreos crumbled up. That would be great. Later that night she asked if it was time for, y'know, the ice cream? And I made her a cup and crumbled up the Oreos and she had a little spark in her eye, and it was better.

But there's still that empty spot on the dresser. My wife says this might be time to replace it with a desk, and I thought that was a good idea, even though I know she'll spend the next year or two on the floor with her computer, on her stomach, legs crossed at the ankles, tapping, drawing, talking. It didn't occur to me until a few minutes ago that the top of the dresser was where her changing area had been, where she'd laid on her back laughing as an infant while I did what you had to do, made the requisite faces of funny horror – stinky! – then stuffed the offal down the diaper genie, and picked her up and gone on with our day. She'll be a senior in high school sitting at a desk in that spot and I'll still remember that like it was yesterday. Time is linear, but so is a piece of string – take two points far apart, put your fingertips together. It was yesterday. Makes you envy dogs, sometimes; everything is now and next. There is no then.

Anyway. Poor little guy. He was all curled up with his eyes closed and his paws drawn up. He was here and now he's not. An hour after the burial a squirrel came up to me as I sat in the gazebo – brazen, fearless – and he looked at me, chattered, and scurried away. Made me think of all the storybook animals kids grow up with, the eternal happy now where a squirrel is every squirrel, a rabbit is every rabbit. You never forget that, really. You'd like to think that when you're old and halt and shuffling through the leaves at the edge of the 100-Acre Wood, the bear and the pig and the donkey and the tiger will appear, waving hallo, welcoming you back.

Who knows. Maybe they will.

–

Pass it along, if you wish

78 RESPONSES TO goodbye ace

Renee V. says:
September 14, 2010 at 2:26 pm

Thank you for the lovely piece! Not long ago my father unexpectedly lost his 10 year old dog. Being a life-long dog lover, he was quite broken up about it. He talked about not getting another dog, but I knew this was a bad decision. He received so much joy and peace from that animal on a daily basis. Finally, I said “Dad, you have to decide if the years of joy are worth the inevitable sorrow. Some things just are…” I'm happy to report that he and the new dog are doing just fine.

Joy and sorrow... We really can't live a complete life without either of them.

DensityDuck says:
September 14, 2010 at 2:38 pm

In other news: Chris Stewart finally admits defeat, declines to run for Mpls school board:

Spike72AFA says:
September 14, 2010 at 3:40 pm

Thanks James. Many of us have shared the same trauma with a child, and you have expressed the feelings better than anyone I know. Thanks for writing so beautifully.

todd says:
September 14, 2010 at 3:52 pm

Thank you for sharing that very well written piece. My sincere condolences.

John Tebeau says:
September 14, 2010 at 5:16 pm

Well said, James.

Ben says:
September 14, 2010 at 5:20 pm

It's true... Hamsters generally don't get old, or become sick and slowly fade away, they just up and die. Every time I go on vacation, I expect to come back and find our little hamster unresponsive in her sock. I'm always surprised when she pops out looking to see if I've brought food.

My favorite hamster when I was a kid mysteriously died at a relatively young age. She was the runt of the litter, and the most friendly. Also seemed to be the most intelligent, because she would come when she was called. I would place my hand in her cage with
the palm up, and she would come running out and sit on my fingers, waiting for me to pick her up and put her in my shirt pocket. And she never peed on my hands, unlike the other ones. Then one day, she was cold and motionless. It was sad, but I knew it was inevitable, and even as a young kid I was pretty much ok with it.

Not quite the same when my cat died. That’s a whole different world of animal relationship. To a hamster, you are a means of attaining food, water, and occasionally a clean home. To a cat, you are a lifelong companion. But at least I got to say goodbye to her…

chrisbcritter says:
September 14, 2010 at 6:00 pm

When I was about seven, my mother told me that some family friends had their cat die “but their mommy told them that it ran away, so don’t say anything about it to them.” Maybe my mother was trying to make a point, but I always felt bad around those kids afterward…

GardenStater says:
September 14, 2010 at 6:10 pm

Lots of interesting posts, thanks.

One of my favorite authors, C.S. Lewis, said that Heaven would be a very sterile place without animals, and I agree. In “The Great Divorce,” he describes a Heavenly procession of a great lady (who ends up being a humble neighborhood woman), surrounded by a procession of boys, girls, and animals:

‘What are all these animals? A cat – two cats – dozens of cats. And all those dogs … why, I can’t count them. And the birds. And the horses.’

‘They are her beasts.’

‘Did she keep a sort of zoo? I mean, this is a bit too much.’

‘Every beast and bird that came near her had its place in her love. In her they became themselves. And now the abundance of life she has in Christ from the Father flows over into them.’

cnyguy says:
September 14, 2010 at 7:17 pm

My condolences to Natalie. It’s a difficult thing to lose a beloved pet, at any age. Rest in peace, Ace the Hamster; I’m sure you enjoyed a good life with Natalie and the Lileks family.

swschrad says:
September 14, 2010 at 8:03 pm

@GardenStater: like that.

love is the only thing that you can give away, that when you count it again, is ten times greater.

Browniejr says:
September 14, 2010 at 9:11 pm

So sorry to hear about your loss…. (wrote that before seeing TeeOC’s
Fortunately the shock of finding Ace will fade sooner than the happy memories Natalie will have of Ace. Since she is being raised right with good, loving parents, she’ll realize the importance of remembering the happy times, and not dwelling on the sadness.

BTW- don't remember Joe ever being that curt with a bereaved wife, at least on the ’60's version. Maybe it was a radio thing.

**Pencilpal** says:
September 14, 2010 at 9:37 pm

Almost seems like the author vanished, and everyone else here felt they wrote this story themselves. That's a nice gift, Mr. L.

Hope the dresser, or desk, is soon cluttered with another friend for Natalie.

**Mal** says:
September 14, 2010 at 9:42 pm

Forty years ago, my niece and the kids next door all had a funeral for her pet rat – complete with eulogies, prayers and a burial. Not quite sure about how well they had performed it, they dug him up for another try. It took a good half-dozen funerals, burials and exhumations over the course of an hour before they felt confident that they’d seen him off right. That, or there was a big plate of peanut butter sandwiches on the picnic table...

**DryOwlTacos** says:
September 14, 2010 at 11:50 pm

No life is so small or insignificant that once it touches our own, we do not feel its loss. Rest in peace, Ace. You were loved.

**MaryIndiana** says:
September 15, 2010 at 12:11 am

Farewell Ace Lileks,Natalie will never forget you just as none of us could ever forget the first pet we lost and mourned. Natalie,I am so sorry.

**Patrick** says:
September 15, 2010 at 7:59 am

@Joe: Or this one someone did:

**Patrick** says:
September 15, 2010 at 8:02 am

Let's try that again...

**Patrick** says:
September 15, 2010 at 8:02 am

Eh, I give up:

http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_00KAacxtpEM/SSuLdlVbBDI/AAAAAAAAG1o/yS7pf6ziAo/s1600-h/hobbes+and.jpg
margaret says:
September 15, 2010 at 11:32 am

Alas, hamsters just don’t seem to have staying power. No one's fault.

We switched to guinea pigs long ago, cause a parg is big enough to hold, hearty enough to wheel around in a toy dump truck, they talk to you and each other with amusing variety, and their litters are small, with fully furred and running-around babies that can be sold to the pet store in four weeks. All is takes to make pargs happy is cardboard boxes to run in and out of.

But they want more space than a dresser top. And they need a friend.

Sarah says:
September 15, 2010 at 12:33 pm

What I wouldn’t give to write something so moving and beautiful. What I wouldn’t give for a Kleenex right now to dry my tears.

John T. Feaster says:
September 15, 2010 at 9:53 pm

I want to say she’ll get over it…but then again, I haven’t yet replaced my poor, dead Moomba. That cat was pure affection, and after she passed (a chilling, bloodless term I can’t get out of the habit of using) I never tried to replace her.

Margaret says:
September 15, 2010 at 10:57 pm

Shoulda gotten a small parrot, James. You would have gotten at least 5 years out of a budgie.

Justin Smallbridge says:
September 15, 2010 at 11:47 pm

Thanks for another fine piece of thinking and writing. We just lost a hamster — and one we inherited, which added guilt about poor stewardship to the grief (“Her life is in your hands, Dude.”). Curious mix of sadness, unfounded (but no less palpable) guilt and stoic determination and effort to understand death on the part of a ten-year-old and his nine-year-old brother attended the backyard burial rites.

Brian says:
September 16, 2010 at 10:28 am

When my dad died my fifth grade classmates all wrote condolence letters. Many of them were of the form “I know how you feel my X died” with X usually being a grandparent. One of them was “I know how you feel, my hamster died.”

Brian says:
September 16, 2010 at 10:30 am

That letter made our day, by the way. It was good to laugh on a sad day.
Natalie says:
September 16, 2010 at 10:11 pm

Well... I just decided to browse around on my Dad's website when I saw this, (he didn't tell me before of course) And started to read. Then after looking at the comments, I would just like to say, Thanks everyone for your sympathy and I am sorry about the pets you have lost also.

-James's Daughter, Natalie

P.S Please excuse some of the spelling or anything else, I'm only in 5th grade!

efurman says:
September 17, 2010 at 3:02 am

Was he named after Ace Rimmer? 😊

Annette says:
September 20, 2010 at 4:56 pm

I am the desk saleswoman from Saturday's shopping expedition and after reading this very lovely piece, I feel quite terrible about telling you and Natalie the story of our hamster, Jimbo (aka "Jesus") who faked death a couple times. Tell her I'm sorry if I made her sad again. I wish I had seen this first.
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

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

© 2011 The Bleat.
Thanks for the words on the Hamster Situation. Not to make too much of it, but you know how it is. Thanks.

I've been purging and pruning my iTunes. The initial idea of having everything you own in your system or on your iPod has, over the years, turned into a nightmare. You have room for everything, so you accumulate everything. Even though it exists as nothing more than a state on a spinning platter, opening up your collection and
seeing 42 weeks worth of continuous music makes you feel inadequate to your own tastes and interests: I have no idea what's in there, really. I have no idea if I even like it anymore. Well, let's check:

Nope, I don't like that. Or that. Or that. Delete. Or . . . no. I may like it someday. Archive, then delete. Damn: I'm going to need another disk to archive this stuff. But disks fail. Better put them on DVDs as a backup backup. And so you spend some of your precious mortal allotment curating stuff about which you do not give a fig, tin or otherwise.

Most of the cruft is 30s and 40s pop music, and while I find it interesting to listen to sometimes I just don't want to own it anymore. When you own something you have to decide what you want to do with it. The good stuff: yes, you keep. The bad stuff: yes, you toss. The middling stuff, though, that's the problem. I might want to listen to that “Ac-centuate the Positive” again some day, even though I really don't care much for Bing and the Andrews Sisters are at their most annoying, and all that faux-Black “chillun’” stuff grates, and oh, hell, toss it. TOSS IT. Mid-tempo indistinguishable Chris Isaak I'm-so-lonely-and-handsome stuff from latter albums: TOSS IT. Nearly anything but the first and last tracks from a 1960s TV soundtrack: TOSS IT. For God's sake, why do I have 96 scratchy Xavier Cugat songs? SELECT ALL / DESELECT BRAZIL / DELETE.

And still there are gigabytes and gigabytes. Keyword search HALLOWEEN. Oh. My. God: 398 MB of unlistenable 50s and 60s novelty tunes. Archive (we have a party once a year, I'm expected to provide this crap) and delete. There's 68 tons of 50s songs I don't like, purchased in the early part of the decade when I was interested in that sort of thing. Or thought I was. I know why: I stayed up late every night with squalling infant on my chest, and the infomercials had these ads for great rock instrumentals. I bought a few. Thought I might want more. Enjoyed the “Cruisin'” series. Couldn't part with any of it because it brought back an era characterized not by actual love of the music, but interest in being interested in it. DELETE.

It's easier to clear it out now because I'm back to listening to the radio, but in internet form. I have an app that tunes and records, and a very slick & sweet app called Pulsar that provides a great way to listen to my satellite subscription on the computer. My personal music collection is now a millstone at worst, a fallback at best – and if you put a gun to my head and said “get it down to 200 tunes” I would almost be relieved. Just don't judge me if I get rid of the challenging, angular fusion-jazz-rock stuff for some ELO.

I like ELO.

Or rather Jeff Lynne; that was the group, more or less. Yes, I know, there was an actual string section – one of the cellists was recently killed by a rogue bale of hay – but it was all his post-Beatles / doo-wop / Chuck-Berry-at-Studio-54 ideas that made the best stuff work, and I've come to regard him as one of those auteurs who could have only attained success in the middle 70s and early 80s, when there weren't any rules about who got to play in the Top 40.
I'll slag the 70s for hours if you want, but musically it was damned ecumenical.

So. This is a job. Paring photos out of the iPhoto is a job. Arranging all the movies we take because cameras got small then smaller then slipped inside your telephone: a job. I spend a little time on this each day – not much, but a little, and it's relaxing. I want my tombstone to read “EVERYTHING HAD TAGS.”

Better than “Loving Husband and Father [citation needed]”

At the office today I was back in the photo files, as usual, and something struck me about the names on the drawers: these would make good Star Wars characters names.
UNTOLD RICHES AWAIT YOU

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

BLEAT PREMIUM

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

Then there's this: sorry, it's not you. It's me.
Of all the things I shouldn't be writing, I'm spending time on something that has demonstrably proven to be non-commercial. I suppose that's why I'm doing it: a defensive crouch. Oh yeah? Well I don't to sell it. So there. But it's so much fun. It's like a form of skydiving where you leap out and hope you come across a parachute on the way down, preferably before you hit the ground. In this case the ground is Minute 30, which is when I have to stop typing.

Tonight I wrote the 20th of the second batch of Joe Ohio stories. Did so after dinner: cleaned the dishes, bade the wife farewell as she took the dog out, opened the folder with all the matches, scrolled down without looking at the window, hit open, looked at it, and off I went. It takes about 30 seconds to get the first line, if that; sometimes, it's immediate. What makes the stories easy – the main character sells and creates matchbooks, so they mean something to him, and give him a reason to have them play a large role in his life – makes it difficult, too; there are only so many ways I can spin a story off a matchbook. He has to make it, or be given it. That's it. There can't really be an overarching plot, because you can't tie together the sort of things that happen to you in your daily life simply by a fortuitous string of matchbooks, but since I'm choosing them at random, unseen, I can fudge that a little. But daily life doesn't really have a plot. Things happen and some of them mean something and some of them cohere into larger things. How to make the stories self-contained but have an overall arc – they take place between June 1957 and Christmas – is the trick. And so far it's working.

Drives me nuts that it's not commercial, though. The reader for my last publishing house – no doubt one of the 20-somethings who graduated from a nice school and lives with three others in Williamsburg – just said it was "episodic." Well, yes. It is that. Guilty as charged. I thought the high-concept nature of the project – one man's fictional life summoned out of one real man's collection – would at least be interesting from the ah-tistic point of view, but I think the character was insufficiently agonized. He didn't have big
problems. He's somewhat lonely but self-contained. He spends a lot of time in 
his own head but he's good with clients. He's not neurotic. He's a guy, that's 
all.

People think of the 50s, they either want happy-clappy drive-in nostalgia, 
Peyton-Place stuff where Passions Simmer behind the Facade, or finger-
clicking beats laying the groundwork for the 60s, man. That's literature. 
Three short chapters where a guy's trying to find a new bar for an after-work 
beer because the old one got ruined when he had a flat date with a steady 
customer is not literature.

Well, I'll sell it to you. If you want it.

–

Flotsam has your link needs for the day; otherwise: HERE for NoDak small 
towns via Google Street view, and HERE for Comic Sins. Enjoy! See you 
around in the usual spots. Oh: and if you're wondering what's the point of 
Flotsam, it's a place where you can catch up on links if you miss a day or a 
week of Bleats. A little customer service. Speaking of which, Bleatplus returns 
Thu or Fri – if you contributed lately and haven't gotten a password, you'll 
get it before the next update.

71 RESPONSES TO filing cabinet labels that 
would make good star wars names

Kevin says: 
September 15, 2010 at 3:45 pm

“But there is one thing I know
A man's a two-face, a worrisome thing
Who'll leave you to sing the blues in the night”

“A man's a two-face”?? Think you left off a couple of letters in that 
transcription. 😊

rivlax says:
September 15, 2010 at 3:59 pm

In the third grade (1956) I sat right next to our class's volumes of the 
Encyclopedia Britannica. For some strange reason I have never 
forgotten that one of the volumes was labeled “Pumps to 
Russellville.” It's always sounded like a good title for a Southern 
novel or something.

DensityDuck says:
September 15, 2010 at 4:17 pm

“Well said GardenStater. There must be a 10 gauge rock salt shell 
somewhere in a drawer for the varmints around here.”
.yeeesss, that's an entirely appropriate response to disagreement; IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE SHOOTING THE PERSON WITH A GUN.

Sarah says:
September 15, 2010 at 4:36 pm


But Xavier Cugat — I LOVE him. Even at the tracks' scratchiest moments.

Cory says:
September 15, 2010 at 5:00 pm

Garden Stater: Remember – no hamster is an island.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 15, 2010 at 5:07 pm

Mr. Duck, since you decided to enter the fray with your own form of dubious wisdom here, are evidently poorly versed in the nature of a rock salt shell. Unless used at point blank range, they are non-lethal. The salt however does burn in a rather extraordinary manner. Since we were speaking of skunks and other such varmints, your point is? After all, I have never encountered anyone from Ducks Unlimited using such a projectile on waterfowl.

blivet says:
September 15, 2010 at 6:50 pm

I agree with DensityDuck that there was more tension building in Joe Ohio's story than the author seems to want to acknowledge.

Just the same, I do have a strong attraction for the sort of day-to-day narrative that serves to set the scene in crime novels. I can't help but feel a sense of disappointment when the murder occurs. I wanted to read more about shopping for groceries.

swschrad says:
September 15, 2010 at 7:30 pm

@various: if some 2-legged varmint gets a load of rock salt in his behind, it was earned. out in the country, somebody buys you a round when they hear it.

in the city, they might get you for noisemaking outside the quiet hours of 8 pm to 7 am.

fizzbin says:
September 15, 2010 at 8:10 pm

As I have said, “Please Do Not Feed The Trolls”.

Unless they're Canadians 😊
boblipton says:
September 15, 2010 at 9:13 pm

Just as yesterday's Bleat raised the issue of whether men wore suits and ties at home — I must admit I wear a tie, but no pants — today's Comic Sins makes me wonder: do women wear three-inch heels at home? especially with carpeting?

Bob

GardenStater says:
September 15, 2010 at 9:42 pm

@Kevin: "A man's a two-face"?? Think you left off a couple of letters in that transcription.”

It was originally written to be sung by a woman about a man. I know, I was surprised, too.

DensityDuck says:
September 15, 2010 at 11:48 pm

Mark: I'm sorry, I guess I misunderstood you when you said “rock salt shell”, because I thought you were talking about something that gets used in a shotgun, WHICH IS A TYPE OF GUN.

I know you like playing the hard man here on a past-culture critic's blog, but lighten up, Francis.

Baby M says:
September 16, 2010 at 4:47 am

@JamesS: double bonus points for the Little Feat reference.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 16, 2010 at 10:46 am

OK then DensityDuck, I had no wish or intention of offending you when I made that comment, it directed at the low life that simply makes themselves obnoxious. I must confess though, I have my doubts as to whether you actually understand even now that rock salt shell is used in a shotgun as a non-lethal deterrent for intruders and animals. Now then, if that last sentence addressed to Francis was meant for my tender feelings, it tends to negate your I'm sorry at the opening of your latest missive. Since my remarks seem to trigger something that you usually keep to yourself, how about you let me know what it is that I say here that bothers you so. I don't promise to mend my ways (as it were) that irritate you, but I am genuinely curious as to just what gives rise to your episodic grumps in my direction.

Mike Zensius says:
September 16, 2010 at 11:46 am

Hi!

You say about Joe Ohio: “Well, I'll sell it to you. If you want it.” That's me. Link? How do I pay? The first 50 or so were full of moody goodness. I'll buy more. How?

Love The Bleat. For years. Thanks for all the awesome writing.
DensityDuck says:
September 16, 2010 at 12:22 pm

@Mark: You don't seem to get that the issue here is not the lethality of the gun, but the fact that it was used at all. I'd have had the same reaction if you were saying “hit him with a hammer”, “smack him with a board”, “punch him in the nuts”, any of that. If you're offended enough by speech to do violence to the speaker then you've got a problem.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 16, 2010 at 12:38 pm

OK then, I think I understand what bothers you now. How about trying this concept on for size? Bad behavior needs to be disincentivized. That's a nice sterile abstraction, but how is it done? Time outs work sometimes for children, but tsk tsking to yourself seldom causes a miscreant to cease and desist. Bullies will continue to act that way until they see a good reason to stop. I have no problem calling people on what they do. I've done it here from time to time, and what's more, I've done it in person and within arm's reach.

I sincerely wish the world could be all puppies and ponies and to paraphrase Rodney King, “Can't we all just get along?” When people fall short of that ideal, and I hate to break this to you, but they do so all the time, the rest of us have some choices:

1. Ignore it.
2. Crumble under it emotionally.
3. Get injured or dead from it.
4. Deflect, counter, and defeat it; sometimes with significant harm to the one who has fallen short.

Since I don't seek pre-emptive control of others, my responses are often non passive ones. Others are free to react as they see fit.

fizzbin says:
September 17, 2010 at 11:03 am

My dear Dense..I hope you are sitting down and have taken your quaaludes (not quatloos, they taste terrible) for I have shocking news for you 😈

All wars and other self-esteem damaging violent poopy-turdy stuff are caused by somebody's smart-mouth.

In my long and colorful service to humankind I have found that the surest way to stop smart-mounds from fomenting violence/war is to break their faces. Almost all of the time you need to do this but once. If a few dim-witted smart-mouths that don't understand what you mean the first time, well, as it says on the shampoo bottle, “Break Face…Repeat”.

I hope our little tete a tete amoureux has enlightened and entertained you. I live to serve 😊

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 17, 2010 at 12:35 pm

fizzbin, we gotta share a beer or other potent potable of choice sometime. It may never happen since I'm on the left coast and suspect you may not be far from Pennsylvania(?) I seem to recall
from your own cat herding LEO career. Ah well, I'll take what I can get.

Maureen says:
September 21, 2010 at 7:34 pm

ELO keeps coming back in unexpected places. An animated fan music video created for the Japanese anime convention Daicon, back in the late eighties/early nineties, was set to the song “Twilight”. It became the unofficial anime fan theme song for a long time, and was the reason an entire anime company came into being.

There's a lot of interesting stuff in those songs, and I think that's why they survive.

Maureen says:
September 21, 2010 at 7:39 pm

Argh! I didn't realize they made the Daicon IV animation in 1983; I thought it was just very retro!

Naturally, there's a Wikipedia page explaining every single reference and what three ELO songs are in the video, not to mention several different grainy copies of the film on YouTube.…
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 rain, the clouds, the dankness: October wears September's clothing like a wolf. I woke up in the middle of the night to hear the torrents pound down, and was pleased; nothing like a storm in the middle of the night when you're snug inside. Later today, though, the clouds doubled down and started to dribble, and we realized the dog was outside. Odd: he should be barking. I looked out the window; ah krep. The back gate was open. Then the heavens opened, and all I could think about was my poor dog somewhere in the neighborhood, squinting as they do when it rains, unhappy. Grabbed an umbrella -

He was at the front door, silent, waiting. They may not be too smart but they are not stupid. Of course he won't run away: I serve him the most delicious food he can imagine, burned charcoal sticks. The family knew them as “sweet potato julienne fries with chipotle seasoning,” which they would have been if they hadn't come out of the oven limp as wet shoelaces after 25 minutes. So I did the ol’ “turn on the broiler” trick, gave them a few minutes, then noted that the vents of the oven were doing a recreation of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. Well, daughter doesn’t like them anyway. Dog ate ‘em up.

Ordinary day, column night, et cetera. The iTunes purge continues; today's victims included Helen Forrest and most of the Andrews Sisters and great swathes of later-period John Barry where he's just repeating the main theme, pausing, changing keys, then inserting John-Barry-boilerplate. If you sped them up they'd be jingles. If you sped them up they’d be jingles. By the way, I heard an interview with Barry
Manilow somewhere, talking about how he converted his commercial jingles to pop songs: he just slowed them down. Go ahead, hum “Mandy” as quickly as you can. It's damned bouncy. You can just imagine someone finding personal fulfillment buying canned corn or mouthwash to that melody.

Always hated that song, though. High school. Everything I hated about top-40 music. Stupid lyrics: you came and you gave without taking. Then I sent you away. So you're a d!@#*!, then, and I should feel sorry? The obligatory modulation when the song had overstayed its welcome. Augh. I had a pal in high school – well, clarification. He was one of those friends you have when you're young who's not quite a pal or a bud, but he's part of the social circle, and you get along. Nearly everything that interests him bores you, and vice versa, but there are a few commonalities. In this case we were both on the speech team, were close to a mutual friend for different reasons (Them, sports; us, music), agreed the same women in the speech team were hot, and in general did not get on each other's nerves. In high school that's enough.

He was a Jefferson Starship fan. I hated Jefferson Starship. So for some reason I think he was a Manilow fan too. Memory is cruel that way. Life can be crueler; I remember we were in the bus heading back from a speech tourney one night, or maybe out as a pack heading to Embers for coffee and cheesecake, and Frankie Valli – experiencing a Grease-induced resurgence – came on the radio to sing “My Eyes Adored You.” As the lyrics had it, he never laid a hand on her. The young lady in the car who was the object of Mr. Starship's obvious and unfulfilled amour turned around in her seat, eyes bright, and said “hey, that's just like (Mr. Starship Fan). He never laid a hand on me either!” Of course, he was present. He shrunk down in the seat, consumed by the harpies of mortification and hormones.

If it helps, imagine him as Judge Reinholdt in “Fast Times at Ridgemont High,” because there was a strong resemblance. Her? Happy perky and birdy, with straight black hair with a straight part in the middle and polyester pants hiked up above the waist with a blouse containing many conflicting brown patterns. Sigh. Her brother was the equivalent of guy in “Fast Times” who could get anyone anything, right down to the easy smoove stoner slide. Anyway, I thought of Mr. Starship Fan the other day when one of their songs came on the radio. Last time I saw him he had the same sardonic smile that bubbled over into a great open laugh; he was doing well. Very well. Works six blocks from me. Haven't seen him in years.

If you're reading this, my old friend, I know, I know. The tales you could tell.

Speaking of blasts, past-oriented and otherwise: I got the most amazing letter today. A real letter, handwritten, with delightful illustrations. Concerned a post on a noir movie from a few years ago; her father was the star. Jaw on sternum. I mention it to state the obvious, paraphrasing Jackie Gleason: Bleat audiences are the greatest audiences in the world! (Grin, sip, bask in self-congratulatory applause.)
Now watching “Silent Running,” a well-balanced, intelligent piece of speculative fiction that asks the question: what would redneck astronauts do if they were asked to destroy the last forests in the solar system with nuclear weapons? Would they laugh, chew gum, drive to the bomb sight hooting like hillbillies, or all three? I think we know the answer.

The pity of the movie, aside from Bruce Dern’s creepy perv-o Organic Space Jesus performance, is the hard sci-fi hiding behind all the preachy dreck. At the time it was seen as a logical inheritor of the “2001” mantle, probably because Douglas Trumbull was the director. But dramatically and conceptually, it’s incoherent. On the other hand: the robots were the precursor to R2D2. Worst influential film EVER, as they say.

Bonus: soundtrack by PDQ Bach. Extra bonus: imdb says Michael Cimino (written by) and Steven Bochco (written by). Whoa. You can see it stream on Netflix, and if you’re interested in that peculiar period of sci-fi between 60s cheese and Star Wars, it’s necessary. Not saying it’s good, just necessary. (Sort of.) If nothing else, you’ll see where R2D2 came from.

Today: Black and White World! It’s HERE. See you around the usual places.

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72 RESPONSES TO if only you believed

buzz says:
September 16, 2010 at 1:17 pm

SILENT RUNNING was the Universal Studios stupified version of Trumbull's original idea, “Running Silent”. Same basic premise, but the corporations behind the fleet weren’t so eeeevil, the fleet orbited Saturn because it let the domes be exposed to direct sunlight w/o overheating them, the domes were to be abandoned, not blown up, and Dern’s character was recognized as much more dangerous & capable of plunging his freighter into a heavily populated area. There was also a major sub-plot involving aliens who recover the last dome & one of the robots.
The bots themselves were played by lower limb amputees walking on their hands. They made for some pretty memorable scenes. Much of the movie was shot inside a decommissioned aircraft carrier, giving it an air of versimilitude most sci-fi films lacked.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 16, 2010 at 1:28 pm

Trumbull does make things look believable. Too bad a lady falling off a boat, that he had nothing with, did so much to hurt his career.

John M. Hanna says:
September 16, 2010 at 3:13 pm

I saw ‘Silent Running’ in high school. My reading teacher played it because we were reading a lot of sci-fi stories. Even then, as a dumb teenager, I was asking “Really? Nuke the domes? I know this film is painting humans as huge jerks but nuking the domes is just overkill.”

JohnW says:
September 16, 2010 at 4:22 pm

Speaking of ELO:

RLR says:
September 16, 2010 at 4:44 pm

@bgbear re: “Too bad a lady falling off a boat, that he had nothing with, did so much to hurt his career:”

From what I’ve read, Trumbull's problems had more to do with his desire to finish _Brainstorm_ than Ms. Wood’s death. MGM execs wanted to scrap the flick & collect insurance; Trumbull wanted to complete it. The insurance company agreed with Trumbull and provided the cash to finish it.

Trumbull's name became Mud thereafter at MGM.

madCanada says:
September 16, 2010 at 4:55 pm

Hey, what's with all this ragging on pessimistic Sci-Fi? I'll tell you WHO abides ONLY positive stories: North Korea. The occasional plunge into despair is good for the soul. “King Lear” ain't exactly “The Sound of Music,” but those who know it would say it's an essential human text.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 16, 2010 at 5:13 pm

@RLR, yes, that is my understanding and I meant it was triggered by her death.

@madCanada; you are right when referring to the genre in general, however, most of us who are old enough remember the era that “Silent Running” came out in, it seemed every science fiction movie,
even TV Sci Fi movies, had a negative ending. It was just getting to be too much. “Logan's Run” broke the trend (and of course also “Star Wars”).

Vlad the Impala says:
September 16, 2010 at 5:15 pm

Those who do not remember history are condemned to repeated showings of Bruce Dern killing the other crewmen to avoid destroying PLANTS.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 16, 2010 at 5:34 pm

Hey, there were bunnies and squirrels and deer too.

Let's see cute little bunny or Ron Rifkin, c'mon it is not even close.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 16, 2010 at 5:34 pm

@bgbear, maybe my memory of “Logan's Run” is flawed, but I seem to recall that it had a pretty negative ending as well. Or am I misremembering some other similar movie?

madCanada says:
September 16, 2010 at 5:47 pm

How many pure sci-fi films have there been post-Star Wars anyway? That flick killed the genre. Since then, it's really been mostly other genres in disguise … detective (Blade Runner), horror (Alien), action (…all the others.) etc

I'm currently reading a history of the Walt Disney Co. Apparently, when “Star Wars” came out, they kicked themselves, saying they should have made that film. That says a lot — about both Disney and “Star Wars.”

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 16, 2010 at 5:58 pm

IIRC Logan's Run ends with the destruction of the domed city. Many are no doubt killed but, there are many survivors and they come out and meet the old man and presumably will live full lives. Logan and Jessica live.

fantabulous says:
September 16, 2010 at 6:52 pm

Those robots look like piles of junk. I can remember things looking like that when I was in my teens. Even brand new things looked like they were ready for the trash heap. Good Lord, look at the “speakers” on those robots!

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 16, 2010 at 7:44 pm

Well OK then, bgbear. I guess my utilitarian calculus tendencies must have lead me to my perception of the ending. Peace.
Janet says:
September 16, 2010 at 10:09 pm

Anyone know that song Joan Baez was warbling over the end credits?

Ed says:
September 16, 2010 at 11:17 pm

Did you noticed in the first movie clip in todays B&W, that the big corporate building had what appears to be devils horns at the top? pretty freaky 😈

When I was a kid, I wanted to see Silent Running so bad, the commercials were great for its time. But no.. Mom said no. So I had to wait years to see it on video, so I rented it, watched it, and I couldn't get over how damned depressing the whole thing was. The special effects were good, but oh man. Mom, as usual was right again.

Kev says:
September 17, 2010 at 7:11 am

Didn't care much for “Mandy” and Barry didn't write it anyway. Scott English and Richard Kerr did (ironically, he didn't write “I Write the Songs” either).

I figured someone would beat me to the punch on this one, since I'm a day late. But here's the bonus trivia: When Scott English recorded the song himself, a few years before Manilow, it was called “Brandy”—no relation to “Brandy (You're a Fine Girl)” by Looking Glass, which came out a year after English's version. (This is why Manilow changed the name to “Mandy”—to avoid confusion with the other song.)

JamesS says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:31 am

I'm still waiting for someone in Hollywood to make Larry Niven's Ringworld. Of course, I'm also trembling in fear of what they might do to it, a la Starship Troopers.

I'm also still laughing at “Run, forest, run!”

JamesS says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:36 am

Seth McFarlane may have had the last word on “Mandy” via Family Guy, where he had Barry warbling it to Quaqmire at a concert: Oh, Quaqmire, you came and you gave without taking..., as Quaqmire melted in his seat and basically got all verklempt.

RobertB says:
September 17, 2010 at 11:17 am

Wow, I think people are being too hard on “Silent Running.” Yes, the premise is ludicrous, and based on idiotic ’70s hippie nonsense. But if you set that aside, the film itself is intelligently constructed and well executed; and I think it stands head and shoulders above most of the other crappy SF from the era. The visual effects have also
aged remarkably well.

“Silent Running” also deserves credit as being one of the classic 1970s SF films that inspired Duncan Jones in making 2009’s marvelous “Moon.”

Mal says:
September 17, 2010 at 11:08 pm

“Bruce Dern’s creepy perv-o Organic Space Jesus performance...”
Oh, jeez; is that ever right; and I even LIKED the movie when it came out! What the heck was he DOING there?

DensityDuck says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:50 am

@RobertB: Dammit, right up until then I wanted to see “Moon”...
reading this? Really?
Another cool low day. I stopped checking my iPad weather app; I have disengaged from weather, from the idea of Outside. Right now I’m sitting in a room where I can’t see outside, listening to Bruckner. It is a fall thing to do. First I listened to the Third, which is what you get when you feed a lot of notes into a reassembly machine and use the “Bruckner” setting; it just goes on and on until the end of the first movement, when the composer seems to remember these things should end at some point. The Fourth is a different work entirely. There is nothing else so massive. One teaspoon of the score requires six men to haul it to the podium. It is awesome, but like all his works the adagios are murder on a cloudy autumnal day – great stretches of bleak despair, the sound of a man watching the end of things disappearing into the early sunset. It’s not that things are over; it’s the bitter realization that they were over before you knew it, and all you can do now is recollect before that, too, fails you.

Happy Friday! Sorry. It’s been a week. Casting around for happiness, looking for things to drive away the feeling of being adrift in a place I do not want to be. You will be horrified to learn I have failed to produce a 100 Mysteries today – oh, I watched it. It’ll be slid into the main index without fanfare tomorrow, with guilt and disgust. Anything else to add today? Oh my yes. But first:

I found this ancient photostat of an architectural rendering from 1960. I love it:
I love fat man with portfolio, standing outside, thinking “I am an architectural draftman’s cliche, but yet I am content with my lot.”

Given the highway construction that carved a great canyon through the area,
I was doubtful it survived. I was wrong. The reality is less impressive than the drawing – not so clean, not so glassy, not so perfect. But if I ever drive past it again, I'll know how it was originally conceived.

And then, for your enjoyment, I tender something I'd never seen before. What a joy – and what a piece of “teen” culture from the era before rock. And dead sexy, too.

Who made it? Disney made it.

And now: links! A few 30s ads, HERE.

With great pride, the overhaul of a site I did more than 10 years ago – new pages, with a twist ending. Ladies and gentlemen: the return of Aunt Jenny, HERE. With extra added Calvin – and some amplification on who she was.
Column at startribune.com HERE – no live link at the moment; scroll down. You'll like it.

BleatPlus is UP. Guaranteed all uncontacted contributors will get their passwords by 1 PM CST. I appreciate your patience.

Gah! Such a week

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**45 RESPONSES TO aunt jenny**

**Brian Lutz** says:
September 17, 2010 at 2:49 am

Was it really necessary to blow up the jukebox at the end of that?

**Irish Al** says:
September 17, 2010 at 3:12 am

Great, great animation. The girl who gets out of the shower and into a pink sweater is two to three million times sexier than Lady Gaga.

**Kerry Potenza** says:
September 17, 2010 at 4:37 am

That animated segment looks familiar. Wonderful stuff. Not that I've seen that one in particular, but I've seen some similar things. It's coming back to me: my daughter has a DVD of the old Disney Silly Symphonies. I think it might be from one of those collections, but after a quick check, I can't find it to verify. Gah! That's going to bug me all day…

**Listening to Du Pre (or: Bud vs. Buddy) « Cultural Rumbles** says:
September 17, 2010 at 4:50 am

[...] Dang! Wish I'd checked out Lileks before I wrote my review. I could have swiped something. Here's Lileks on Bruckner: I stopped checking my iPad weather app; I have disengaged from weather, from the idea of Outside. [...] 

**Cameron** says:
September 17, 2010 at 4:57 am

[1] So I think I'll be avoiding Bruckner this year, then. At least until after New Years.

[2] Thanks for bringing Jenny back. Although, now that I look at it, her smile actually gets more evil looking the larger the picture is.

Aunt Jenny: Would like a cookie, dear?

Me: [backs slowly towards the door.]
Nancy says:
September 17, 2010 at 6:58 am

Woo! I loved the cartoon. Thanks!

Mxymaster says:
September 17, 2010 at 7:23 am

Great gags in the cartoon too. Especially liked the traffic cop bit — I still drive that way.

The dude with the 20's uke bit gets the toss—just as these kids would in the 60's. Sic transit gloria mundi, and all that.

Mxymaster says:
September 17, 2010 at 7:28 am

Oh, and I'll have you know we veterans of the 101st Airborne Schenleys do not take kindly to doubts of our existance. Beware lest the last thing you hear is our mighty roar: “PROTECT ALL BOTTLES!”

Bob_R says:
September 17, 2010 at 7:40 am

Am I right in remembering the cartoon being played pretty regularly on the Mickey Mouse Club back in the 60's? Or maybe on the Wonderful World of Color? (Which we watched on the B&W TV set with a sense of sorrow)

wiredog says:
September 17, 2010 at 7:54 am

Seen on (of all places) Salon.com:
“We can't help it, we are the nation that built the pursuit of happiness into our mission statement.”

Patrick says:
September 17, 2010 at 8:13 am

I nearly choked on my Cracker Barrel biscuits when I was reading some of Calvin's commentary. Probably wouldn't have happened if they'd been made with Spry shortening.

Scott says:
September 17, 2010 at 8:17 am

Wow. I guess burying a hamster will really set a guy off his game.... I was a bit shocked to see him drop an f-bomb in the middle of Aunt Jenny's new site. (Not shocked in a prudish way, of course — I loves me a good f-bomb; it just seems a bit out of character for our dear host)

RPD says:
September 17, 2010 at 8:18 am

A fun bit of animation. I note that it was just assumed that all the kids knew how to dance.
After the young lady gets out of the shower and leaps into her dress, I thought she was going to head out commando, but for a mandatory shot of her bloomers.

**rbj says:**
September 17, 2010 at 8:22 am

Not seeing fall yet. It is getting cooler, but I haven't seen any leaves turn yet. Which is kind of unusual for mid September Toledo.

**Greg says:**
September 17, 2010 at 8:59 am

Apparently, “baby got back” was not a term of endearment in 1946. Forget corn syrup, obesity became the norm when the kids stopped dancing and playing football…building their own cars out of old Model Ts…

**The Other Jeff says:**
September 17, 2010 at 8:59 am

I love the architectural study... and how the reality of the actual building completely missed the target. I spent untold hours in the library at college looking at such drawings, conjectures, predictions, hopes and dreams of the coming future, the new horizons. This type of drawing is so right, and so rarely realized. The problem is that whoever executed the actual construction forgot that proportion is everything. The same thing happens frequently in old automobile ads (the ones that use artwork rather than photography) – the artist would intentionally stretch a car to the ‘right’ proportions, and rarely did the real machine reach that level of art. I sigh for a future that might have been, and the present that we are stuck with.

Time for Bruckner, eh?

**lw says:**
September 17, 2010 at 9:10 am

Do you recognize the tire screeching sound from “All The Cats Join In”? Pretty sure it was used in a famous, long-running cartoon.

Btw, I sent a post a year or so ago about my daughter, her hamster, her love of Lightning Thief books, etc. Hamster called home a few months ago, and, no lie, we buried Smokey in a tupperware container from our lunch meat, usually smoked turkey. (Feel bad I put that plastic box in ground to decompose over next few thousand years, though.) Next hamster was a frenzied biting-machine which built nest after nest without eating or sleeping. She pupped six little ones a week later, FREAKED daughter out to no end. Kept Petco receipt, returned new hamster family,and brought home teddy bear hamster named Ollie. He is very fat and not so bitey.

**joexrayguy says:**
September 17, 2010 at 9:11 am

Aunt Jenny must have been on something beside the lard if she's baking that much every day. The precursor of Mrs. Olsen, eh?
slarrow says:
September 17, 2010 at 9:13 am

Wonderful to see the original here. I became familiar with that cartoon sequence thanks to a mid-80s flirtation Disney had with music videos called DTV. They repurposed that particular cartoon with “Rock This Town” by the Stray Cats. Here’s what I grew up with:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJyw2XNtv0w

buzz says:
September 17, 2010 at 9:23 am

You have no idea how good that segment is. “All The Cats Join In” was part of MAKE MINE MUSIC, one of several post-FANTASIA musical anthologies Disney produced with more middle brow musical tastes. It was designed by Fred Moore, who also did “Casey At The Bat” and FANTASIA’s centaur sequence.

When I worked at Filmation Studios in the late 70s, this was one of the shorts the animators would watch again and again. It’s a perfect mesh of music & animation; we would watch it frame by frame to see how tightly the visuals tied in to the music. In fact, frequently in any given shot there is one element of the cartoon keeping track of the beat (the relatively easy part of “mickey mousing” i.e., matching sight & sound) while another visual element follows the melody.

This is really one of the best things every to come out of the Disney studio.

wimseyguy says:
September 17, 2010 at 9:29 am

Thanks James for sharing such a great video. If that was on the “Wonderful World of Color” in the 1960s, it sure beat the Rex Allen narrated nature stories.

Thanks slarrow for the ’80s remix. Brian Setzer pays homage to such great work.

Thanks finally to buzz. I will rewatch it with greater concentration looking for the elements that bind it together so well at first viewing.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:20 am

I remember watching toon as a young teen and have never got that shower to dressing scene out of my head.

Thank goodness animators and cartoonists are just as lust filled as the viewers.

Gagdad Bob says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:27 am

People forget that Disney once employed heterosexual animators.

swschrad says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:27 am
no dulling sense of ennui this fall, for true fall it is. I'm hopped up on closing an estate and hoping to get a couple fine projects done that have been dragging for several years.

the draggy thing is it's dark when we get up, and dark when we leave work, and that's the waaayyy that it izzz.

@buzz: man, I so used to want to be an animator. but I can’t draw. kinda gutshoots that career fairy.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:39 am

man, I so used to want to be an animator. but I can't draw. kinda gutshoots that career fairy

The problem is that when we were growing up we did not have a president who was willing to be streamed into our classrooms and tell us we could be anything we wanted to be.

JamesS says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:44 am

Personally, I like Dvorak's Symphony No. 9 in E Minor “From the New World” as an antidote to dreary days. Pretty hard not to get a lift from even the Largo movement, and if the Allegro con fuoco doesn’t get you moving, well then, you must be already dead.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:47 am

Sorry for the tough week. You have the weekend to recuperate though, one hopes.

That cartoon was like nothing Disney I’d ever seen before. Interesting little detail near the beginning when the young man holds the phone's handset to the juke box to let his paramour hear the latest tune. Kind of like some things I’ve seen where the young'uns are sharing an earphone each.

Tory Mitchell says:
September 17, 2010 at 11:12 am

Dear Mr Lileks...bless your heart for the Aunt Jenny update! I LOVED Aunt Jenny in your Gallery of Regrettable Food, and I really enjoyed the additional material here. You are the BEST!!!!

Penciplap says:
September 17, 2010 at 11:27 am

Pure delight to watch “All the Cats Join in” – what incredibly skillful storytellers, to use no dialogue, just music, drawings and the occasional exclamatory burst to indelibly mark your mind like that.

@swschrad: http://www.achillesportfolio.com/fallcartoon.htm

Bonnie_ says:
September 17, 2010 at 12:29 pm

When you feel that sad feeling, that drear, the sense of things passing you by, that is your muse.
Get to a keyboard, James, and get some writing done on your novel. Throw everything overboard. Order take out pizza. Let the G-Nat watch iCarly reruns and eat Cheetos if she wants. Ignore any dust on the furniture.

When the muse wraps her ghostly fingers around your heart and squeezes, she must be answered. You must write!

Ahem, that's my humble opinion, anyway.

albo says:
September 17, 2010 at 12:31 pm

I was expecting to see references to stoned travelers loitering at the Intermodal Transit Facility off the plazoid in your Strib column. Very Arcata-ish.

Ed says:
September 17, 2010 at 12:51 pm

James, thanks for posting that Cartoon, it is brilliant. Oh how I wish that Disney had that kind of talent to make a little toon like that one ( well, I must admit, Pixar shorts are much fun, but not close to that ) can you imagine them making it today? Someone somewhere would be offended, and it would be gone gone gone.

Speaking of Disney, my family and I dug up the old VHS tape of “Dr. Syn: The Scarecrow of Romney Marsh“ with Patrick McGoohan. A wonderful little movie. My 11 year old stopped what she was doing to watch. The same with Tomasina. He was great in their movies, much like how much fun it was to watch him when he was on Columbo.

I am glad my child has a chance to enjoy the older classic Disney works. ( she will LOVE that cartoon short )

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 17, 2010 at 1:01 pm

Ed, thanks for reminding me of that movie with McGoohan. It was an interesting first introduction to how Englishmen reacted to negatively to the King's taxes on imports by smuggling. Kind of like what was bubbling in the Colonies at the time. The scene in church where the phrase “there's a press gang on the way” was worked in to the lyrics of the hymn has stayed with me for over 50 years, and I only saw it one time as a kid.

joexrayguy says:
September 17, 2010 at 1:04 pm

Y'think Aunt Jennie's usin' that shortnin' for something other than cooking?

Richard C. Moeur says:
September 17, 2010 at 1:17 pm

Still can't get over the thought that if the 'toons were subject to “real life” time, little sister would be in her late 70s by now.
bgbear (roger h) says:
September 17, 2010 at 1:36 pm

@Richard C. Moeur, and Mickey & Minnie Mouse would have 50 million grandchildren by now.

chrisbcritter says:
September 17, 2010 at 1:48 pm

Didn't Disney also do a version of that cartoon with Danny and the Juniors' “At the Hop”?

RexV says:
September 17, 2010 at 2:33 pm

Aunt Jenny looks like Terry Jones in drag and Calvin looks a bit like Craig Ferguson. And our host was a bit more ribald in the early days it seems. No complaints, very funny just odd to see.

Aleta says:
September 17, 2010 at 3:01 pm

Hey thanks for “All the Cats Join In.” I remember that from way too many years ago and never knew its title. Disney did some wonderful and weird stuff before things went all angular and “modern.” “Pink Elephants on Parade” still makes me go {o.O}

Maharincess of Franistan says:
September 17, 2010 at 4:20 pm

Great to hear the original Aunt Jenny. I've listened to Bob & Ray's Aunt Penny dozens of times, without being able to remember the original. I say “remember” because my mother used to listen to this when I was a tot. As I recall it back over the decades, it was all commercials for Spry and no story, though your clip puts the lie to that.

JerseyAmy says:
September 17, 2010 at 4:25 pm

Add me to the list of those who love “All the Cats Join In.” I've seen it many times, and I want to say it's a bonus featurette on one of my many Disney DVDs.

And Scott, I was wondering if I was the first one noticing the F-bomb buried in the Aunt Jenny update, but I see you caught it. As my mom would say, is that kind of language really necessary? Not that it offends me, but it seemed out character for James and out of place on that particular page.

Cory says:
September 17, 2010 at 5:26 pm

Greatest bad guys in movies- Patrick McGoohan in Silver Streak right up there.

Lisa from MT says:
September 17, 2010 at 6:12 pm
Ever so grateful for the videos! Wow. But... not so crazy about the new Jenny. I’m no prude either but it seemed rather coarse and a bit vulgar this time. Thankfully, with Mr. Lilek's vast amount of work, one rare sour note doesn't spoil all the fun.

**Dr. Spyn** says:
September 17, 2010 at 10:25 pm

Methinks that when Aunt Jenny talks about Calvin “licking the spoon” she's using a euphemism.

As for “All Cats Join In,” I believe the bobbu soxer left the Disney Studios when she blosseed for a dancing career over at MGM [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpWtjJactKY&feature=related].

**Murgatroyd** says:
September 22, 2010 at 1:02 am

*It was designed by Fred Moore, who also did “Casey At The Bat” and FANTASIA’s centaur sequence.*

Hah! While I was watching “All the Cats Join In” I had a flash of recognition: those are the Centaur Girls! With two legs!

(And I’ll take either the bipedal or the quadrupedal girls over Lady Gaga!)
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?
Woke up at 5:30 to one of the worst sounds for sleeping: a smoke alarm telling you its battery is dying. A smoke alarm telling that you are dying, or might, is worse, of course. But that gets you going. BWEE BWEE BWEE. When the battery goes it's different: bweep! sorry. (Pause carefully calibrated to get under your skin because it's not short enough to make you do anything about it instantly, but not long enough so you can figure you'll get to it tomorrow) Bweep! sorry. There are six of them upstairs, all inaccessible except by chair, and getting them open is like trying to crack a walnut with a pair of hot dogs. Eventually I realized that it was the carbon monoxide detector, which is the loudest damn thing you have ever heard when it's angry; when disconnected it makes short sharp chirps like a very large, sarcastic bird. But it's plugged in. Why would it be – oh. The power had gone out.

But why did the power go out? 5:30, Sunday morning? Not as if everyone's running the air conditioning and testing out their movie-premiere lights. We will never know. They never tell you. Perhaps they think we don't care. Well, I do, but like it's none of our business. Don't you worry your pretty little head about it, the lights will come back soon. If I'm going to spend some time synchronizing all the kitchen clocks – 47, by last count – I want an explanation. Well, three clocks. One doesn't count because it's on the oven, and I don't know anyone who checks the oven clock to see if they're running late. The microwave, more so. The radio, most def, because it's connected to the news and stuff so it must be right . . . except that it's not, unless I sync everything using the computer, which is tied into the ATOMIC CLOCK. All so I
can get the kid out the door in the morning before the bus lumbers off.

Oh, sure, there are simpler, more honest ways, like marking the position of the sun with electrical tape on the floor, but you have to change them every few days. Or I could wear a watch. But I got out of the watch habit. Don't need to be precise except for the bus, and besides, I have a good sense of time; take me away from a clock, let me do something, and I can generally tell you how long I've been doing it – unless it's computer work. Minutes flows like minnow through a brook when you're on the computer.

It's nice around here this time of year.

If a bit cool. Ten degrees on average.

We went shopping on Saturday afternoon to get a desk. The desk will replace the dresser, which is an old changing-table that doesn't look like a changing table, but will always be a changing-table to me. For Gnat it's the place where Ace's cage once sat, and now it's horribly empty. So a desk is next, even though I expect she will continue to sit on the floor. I couldn't find the place
at first, and was distracted by a strip mall that had it all: Mexican restaurant, Chinese restaurant, Pizza restaurant, Indian restaurant. Then I spied an “international grocery store,” which is always fun, so we headed in. Whoa: it was an Indian supermarket, complete with frozen food aisle – as if it had been scooped up from an Indian city and dropped here in the ‘burbs. Nothing but Indian, so it wasn’t that international, alas. An entire aisle of pickled things. Bags of rice you needed a forklift to get to your car. Who’s up for finding amusement in the label styles of another culture?

The first thing I saw, and bought, was a “sweet and hot” chili sauce, which I thought would be good on eggs, as I’m tired of Frank’s Red Hot. The label said it should be stored in a “cool, hygenic place,” so that ruled out putting it in the firepit under the outhouse, but I figured I could find a place. The label also said it was “good before 18 months after the manufacture date” – which is not how they phrase things HERE IN AMERICA, PAL. Tasted weird. Imagine a mild hot sauce with a cup of sugar. Back to Frank’s – but that was still in the future. Onward:

Green goo-logs, yes, but they’re Sterilized! Whew. In the sauce aisle: tell me how devoted you are to the gravy, lads!
We're All-in, boss! Yes, All-in-Gravy, for when you're agreed that everyone will devote everything they have – resources, energy, ingenuity – to the gravy.

Halal marshmallows make you realize there's meat in there somewhere. Then we found the desk store, and Gnat soon wanted a bunk bed with a desk tucked underneath. Well, who wouldn't. She also liked the bedding, and I said it meant we would have to repaint her room, and she said fine. But that would mean new curtains. That's fine. So the hamster dies, and we have to completely redo her room for $1200? No. But we'll go back and buy a beanbag at least, if not a desk, since the manager was a long-time fan, and even asked after Jasper. (He's fine.)

Also went to the antique store to kill some time while child was in Lego League, and saw the usual things. The boys:
Wagner always dominates these groups; Beethoven just looks irritated. These little busts once adorned pianos all over America, totems of High Culture for middle-Americans. They're from the era when houses had the sound of canaries and smelled like cigarettes.

A painting, apparently drawn from life during one of those Vaseline storms:
These two seemed to go together.
Oh, there was more to the weekend, including the end-of-summer-oh-who-are-we-kidding-it’s-fall festival at the local church, complete with carnival rides and a band and wine for Moms and beer for Dads. Ran into a neighbor who worked on the “Red Dawn” movie, and expressed condolences that it's still not out. He told me they shot a sequence at the K-Mart HQ in Troy, which is vacant. You can do a lot with a vast, vacant office part. It's supposed to be demolished and replaced with a Lifestyle Shopping Power Center, or whatever the term is nowadays for those malls that don't have to worry about paying for climate control, but that's on hold. The buildings are pure perfect 70s craptitecture, brown and glassy with ENORMOUS SERVICE CORES that rise about the buildings to remind you of the HONESTY and NAKED STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY OF SERVICE CORES, and if I can judge from the few grainy photos I've seen I'd bet the bricks are thin and vertical. That was the rage; that was the style. Men in brown suits with orange turtlenecks looked upon their work and say Yea, it is good. Well, no, but Yea, it will do.

And then a block party! And then back to work. It'll be a bounteous crop here at lileks.com; I've done enough already to fill out the week.

UPDATES:

Minor Matchbook.

LA Dining 1962 continues.

Remember, FLOTSAM has all your update needs. And, if you're one of those people who is fascinated by my incessant need to redesign things, the Miscellany site has a new, slick interface.

Tumblr is loaded up with three items for tomorrow; PopCrush starts at nine. See you around!

Pass it along, if you wish

48 RESPONSES TO hygenic

Justene says:
September 20, 2010 at 12:45 am

One of my daughters had a bunny die in her room. She refused to sleep in it ever again. Redecorating might have helped.

chrisbcritter says:
September 20, 2010 at 3:45 am

At last, an ad for El Coyote – celeb hangout and the site of Sharon Tate's last meal. And across the street at 7373 W. Beverly was the Spanish Kitchen, which probably won't be listed as it mysteriously closed in '61 and was allowed to sit intact for decades – folklore grew around it over the years; I even shot video of the tattered building with its corroded '30s signage sometime around 1989. Eventually, the elderly widow of the owner moved out and passed
away; now it's a spa (they just covered the “NISH” on the blade sign!).
More here: http://www.donray.com/spanishkitchen.htm

Brian Lutz says:
September 20, 2010 at 4:04 am

All-in-Gravy, for when you're agreed that everyone will devote everything they have – resources, energy, ingenuity – to the gravy.

Either that, or a pair of sevens when you're short stacked.

Obi-Wandreas says:
September 20, 2010 at 5:50 am

Frank's has a decent flavor, but at a measly 500 scoville units, it's just too darn weak. Standard Tabasco is a nice, comfortable 2500 – 5000 units (which is why I keep it in a holster in my car), but can, at times, have too much of a vinegar flavor. A favorite of mine is Busha Browne's Pukka Pepper sauce. It is essentially scotch bonnet jelly, and provides a nice sweet (but not sugar-sweet) heat to foods. It also weighs in at a comfortable 4440 scovilles.

Dale Osborn says:
September 20, 2010 at 6:58 am

So, is Natalie back to Gnat?

Pencilpal says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:00 am

Tchaikovsky seems to be spreading rumors about Wagner to Rachmaninoff.

“His wife says he's a little leit in the motifs.”

Philip Scott Thomas says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:04 am

Halal marshmallows make you realize there's meat in there somewhere.

No, but marshmallows do contain gelatin, which may or may not be from halal sources.

Mxymaster says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:39 am

Damn, we had two full sets of the plastic composer busts. Piano teacher would give you a star if it seemed like you practiced during the week, and when you got enough stars you got a composer. Wagner was my favorite, since he looked serious and energetic. Others looked blase or constipated.

Animal thoughts: I was surprised to recognize the matchbook bison for what it is. I like buffalos (buffaloe?) well enough, but they look like a particularly fuzzy bull that ran headfirst into something really hard, and everything shifted forward.

Hate that German lion on the Old Heidelburg. Hated it when I saw it as a kid on signs for Lowenbrau. Creepy and un-liony.
Finally, enjoyed the hotel lobby pic. Anyone else think the Gnu from Wiki's “GNU Free Documentation License” look completely, absolutely baked? Much more than the Cockney. Baked like a Virginia ham at Easter, is that gnu.

Kevin says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:40 am

Can somebody tell me what a “service core” is?

M. Brown says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:40 am

Craptitecture! What a fabulous word.

wiredog says:
September 20, 2010 at 8:03 am

“I got out of the watch habit.”
Glad I never did, as I can tell what time it is without putting on my reading glasses. Yes, it's an analog watch.

@Kevin:
The service core is where the elevators, water pipes, and airshafts the terrorists use to enter CTU are.

Russ Shackelford says:
September 20, 2010 at 8:11 am

The purpose of the oven clock is to remind you how hard it is to synchronize it with the microwave clock.

That, or there is a time zone change in their two feet of separation.

They mock me with their mismatched times.

Jennifer says:
September 20, 2010 at 8:20 am

In two, brief sentences you described a neighbors house from when I was a child. Those little busts on the piano fascinated me (Beethoven always looked royally pissed off) when I'd visit. The family used to live in Brooklyn and “moved on up” to the suburbs. Alas, no canary.

Geoff says:
September 20, 2010 at 8:28 am

The oven clock is an order of magnitude brighter and larger than the microwave clock, so I use that one regularly – I can see it from the dining room where I’m typing this very post. I have two minutes before I have to leave for work.

And let me recommend Cholula Garlic hot sauce. Best hot sauce ever!

Brisko says:
September 20, 2010 at 8:36 am

I like that North American Life and Casualty logo for some reason. I
I couldn't tell you why if you put a gun to my head, though; I just do.

There's a small, abandoned office park near my office. Three huge, beautiful buildings with a gorgeous view of the mountains on one side and the lake on the other, and wonderfully manicured and maintained grounds that are still tended to twice weekly. And they've all been up for sale or lease for the 2 and a half years since my employer moved to this building.

It baffles me, but I figure they must be god awful expensive because there's no other place around here I'd rather have an office in and I can't be the only one.

Richard C. Moeur says:
September 20, 2010 at 9:42 am

We're still waiting for “cool” around here – ONE HUNDRED AND TEN freakin' degrees yesterday.

But it beats shoveling in February. Must repeat to self as sweat runs into eyes at 7 AM…

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 20, 2010 at 9:42 am

Love that riotous growth of the yard photo. Since it's Autumn, have the grasshoppers arrived yet?

Since you decided to wax so eloquently on a Deccan Plain frame of mind, it made me think of a DVD rental store about a mile from where we live called Filmistan. As you might surmise it is Bollywood Central for DVD rentals. This in turn brought to mind that great movie “Bride and Prejudice” which was just stunning in the use of color, dance, and romance. It was also an interesting transposition of the 18th century British class system into a 1st versus 3rd world kind of sexual tension with a wonderfully romantic ending.

Lars Walker says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:08 am

I took piano lessons for six freakin’ years, and never earned a composer bust. I wanted Beethoven. I've always liked Beethoven; he was like House. He was surly all the time, never made any effort to get along with anybody, but they had to treat him nicely because he was so blasted brilliant. That was how I wanted to be when I grew up.

Needless to say, I failed. But I mastered the surly part.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:29 am

Lileks

Halal marshmallows make you realize there's meat in there somewhere.

Daring new marketing plan: Halal Marshmallows in Lucky Charms!
GardenStater says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:30 am

I also got out of the watch habit, mostly because the feeling of the strap on my wrist began to irritate me.

And count me as another Cholula fan!

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:34 am

I am sure you know you can get a decent loft/desk set up at IKEA without much $.

swschrad says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:34 am

(slips into character) I never HAD a composer bust. My piano teacher never had composer busts. I'll bet that Liddy had one. He's a little nuts, isn't he? Well, I'm not playing pianissimo here. </b?

I'm wondering where the old family piano can go to do some good for somebody when we strip bare the (sold) estate house, for some reason, that's bothering both the wife and I... my sister hasn't played in 8-10 years and doesn't seem inclined to take it up again.

swschrad says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:35 am

insuring the bold is closed against a slipped pinky

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 20, 2010 at 10:46 am

is “Cholula” the green, sticky spawn of the stars with hideous appearance, gargantuan size, that evokes abject terror or am I thinking of something else?

James O says:
September 20, 2010 at 11:01 am

Mild hot sauce + cup of sugar = BBQ sauce. You might try it on some roasted meat.

Will says:
September 20, 2010 at 11:32 am

I have a digital clock/radio in the bathroom that vexes me seriously. When I set it, I set it as closely as possible to either the USNO clock (1-719-567-6742, if you want to call) or the radio-set atomic clocks. It continually gains time until it runs about 5 minutes fast, and then seems to settle down. I don't know how it does it, but it always seems to stabilize there. Every other clock in the house behaves and stays within a few seconds of the standard time.

John says:
September 20, 2010 at 11:42 am
At several times in my life I have decided to study Arabic, but I always give up: there is no way I am going to travel or live months in, uh, Arabistan. I used to try to read CNN Arabic, but I discovered that once you found “Palestine,” “Israel,” and a number, it was a body count: you could stop looking for “distributed,” “free,” and “ice cream cones.” The news, if that single word is not an oxymoron in the Middle East, was totally predictable. But I am pleased to observe that the Arabic for “halal marshmallows” is, almost literally, that. Guess they don’t have a native expression for the things.

hpoulter says:
September 20, 2010 at 11:59 am

GS: The thing I miss least about watch-wearing is trying to put on a backpack and having the #$%* strap catch in the watch band. I am amused, though, that we all now check the time like great-grandfather – we pull a timepiece (now also a phone) out of a pocket and squint at it. You can get fancy wristwatches really cheap these days, but who cares?

bgbear, speaking of Ikea, I like to check out the Ikea Hacker blog for ideas. Sometimes some very creative uses of Ikea stuff.

http://ikeahacker.blogspot.com/

Brisco says:
September 20, 2010 at 12:00 pm

@ John

So what country would you recommend for free icecream cones? I haven’t had any icecream in ages and that sounds great to me.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 20, 2010 at 12:07 pm

I really like a nice wrist watch and my wife is quite the collector.

Probably just another one of those things I did not have as a youngster that I treat myself to today.

swschrad says:
September 20, 2010 at 12:56 pm

heh, us old phartes still use our pocket watches.

except now they also make phone calls, dadgummit. that bothers me, the crank on the side keeps catching the pocket.

Pete Madsen says:
September 20, 2010 at 2:10 pm

I would think that the hot steam boiler would bother you even more.

MJBirch says:
September 20, 2010 at 2:10 pm

re the two who “belong together”

oh-my-God… it’s Ken Cosgrove and a headless Joan!
Jimmy H says:
September 20, 2010 at 2:17 pm

I stopped wearing a wrist watch several years ago. It took about a year and a half for the indentation on my wrist to disappear. I've become fairly good at guessing the time. I don't need a watch as much as I once did. The advent of e-mail communication made it so that the number face to face client meetings (appointments) has greatly decreased on my job.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 20, 2010 at 2:21 pm

@MJBirch, Tee, hee good Madmen ref but, I think it is Peter Campbell.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 20, 2010 at 2:33 pm

@swschrad, the crank huh? I'm not sure if I mentioned this before or not but the village I lived in had crank phones until 1968.

Cory says:
September 20, 2010 at 4:54 pm

Amarillo Slim:
“When I was a boy without a watch, I wanted a Timex worse than anything in the world. I started playing poker and winning and I bought one. Then I won my first tournament, and I wanted a Rolex worse than anything in the world. So I bought one. Then I won the World Series of Poker and I wanted a Philippe Patek worse than anything in the world. So I bought one. Then one day I realized the greatest luxury of all was not having to wonder what time it was.”

swschrad says:
September 20, 2010 at 4:59 pm

@Mark E Hurling: pity the crank calls are still with us.

there was one manual exchange someplace, I think, in Maine until the very early 90s.

“manual exchange” meaning (for those age-deprived) you either spun the crank or went off-hook, and when Sophie got around to getting to your little red light on the cordboard, she clicked in, turned the battery switch or plugged into your jack, and connected you with who you wanted with cord patches. then flipped the other folks' battery switch on if equipped, or just hit the ringer. when the operator jacked out, the red light went out, and a white one came on for each call.

when one party hung up, their battery light went out. the operator would then unplug both sides.

that's how it was done when kerosene was king, or if your business had a branch exchange system before the 60s.
Mark E. Hurling says:
September 20, 2010 at 5:33 pm

Our manual exchange for Papineau was the next town 5 miles away called Martinton. You gave the crank a looong turn and when she picked up, you said, “Phoebe, can get me long distance?” Sissy Spacek was one such operator in the movie “Raggedy Man.” She had the old tip and ring plug-in sequence down pat, just like I saw Phoebe do it a time or two.

We were on a 6 station party line. In this kind of arrangement all 6 parties could hear the incoming ring from Phoebe. Our number was 17F11, which meant one long turn of the crank followed by one short one. The long turn indicating a 10 and the short turn a 1. My Dad would give holy h**l to anyone like Masel Wolf who would listen in on other people's calls on our party line.

Terry Fitz says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:02 pm

PencilPal...you gave me my first chuckle of the day (and it's 7:00pm). Reminds me of why Bach had so many children (his organ didn't have any stops). They don't write 'em like that anymore.

stevelli says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:07 pm

Another vote here for Cholula Garlic (and a good wristwatch).

Looking at the restaurant pages, it strikes me that we almost never patronized foreign cuisine when I was growing up in '50s and '60s L.A. Granted, we didn't think that Mexican food was foreign, and I don't figure a Smorgasbord was, either.

Nowadays, it's rare for us to eat somewhere that isn't “foreign”. Not that we get out much, mind.

fizzbin says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:36 pm

@bgbear – Cholula is very Dagonesque (leaves only the arms hanging in the shakles). And I have no idea what that means.

@Mark E – and I bet you miss crankin' it, heh.

Rats, the Muse has left the building, that's all I got 😞

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:37 pm

fizzbin, for one the few times I am left speechless.

fizzbin says:
September 20, 2010 at 7:54 pm

Heh, interesting conversation with an AFL-CIO political worker just now. With my 9 in hand (behind my back of course – I'm not always a horses arse) I shined her on 😊 She now thinks I'm a worshiper of the Obahmasigha. Maybe I am equines' patoot.

@Mark E – I thought you were more to the right!
**Daniel says:**
September 20, 2010 at 7:55 pm

Inquiring mind needs to know: for what holiday are halal marshmallows marketed?

Oh and I love Mr. Booffie-Tie ogling Mme. The-Bust!

Thanks, James!

**Mark E. Hurling says:**
September 20, 2010 at 8:40 pm

I guess that's what living for too long on the Left Coast will do to you.

**Adina says:**
September 21, 2010 at 12:33 am

Halal Marshmallows are probably like Kosher Marshmallows— it simply means that instead of beef bone based gelatin they are made with gelatin from fish bones (or something like that). Both are equally lovely to think about when making smores...

**Patrick says:**
September 21, 2010 at 9:23 pm

Every time I look at those busts, I expect them to start singing a la the busts in the “Haunted Mansion” ride at Disneyland.
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?
A good Monday, but I like Mondays. Back to duty. Fie to the formless meanderings of Sunday; hurrah to the brisk order of the workaday world. The most remarkable thing about the day was the weather; it was cold and damp until 4 PM, and then the sun just ARRIVED and the temps went up ten degrees, and it was warm and humid at 11 PM, which is to say, now. Reminded me how much I love warm nights, and how quickly I had simply told myself that they were over and done and that was that, let's move along. A brisk cold onset to Fall is injurious to the local psyche; it is simply depressing to behold the beauty of Fall through the glass of your automobile window with the heater on.

To add to the absurdity: this morning the lawn fertilizer guy showed up and doused the veldt, and I wondered exactly what this was for: so I could have a verdant carpet under the inevitable layer of dead tree cells? We always talk of lawns browning in the summer, which they do, but they don’t quite go dun-hued in winter. They stay green. The snow comes. The snow covers. The snow melts, at first, and the green reasserts, one last stand before it’s smothered for the duration. But even then if you dig down, you find green. Maybe the guy wasn’t applying weed-killer. Maybe he was applying paint.

Hey! Let’s all participate in a contest. Use this link, enter the contest, and I get another chance to enter the contest. The prize is a year’s worth of groceries!
Which is great, right, but it's not that great. It's a check for $5200, which must be the average people spend. Hundred bucks a week. We probably spend a bit more, since there's take-out Chinese on Thursday – cheap – and $15.00 worth of pizza on Fridays, but otherwise we're pretty frugal, foodwise. My main indulgence a few weeks ago was some cheese and peppered salami. They're like Burton and Taylor when they were really, really getting along. Tonight, for example: $1.24 for a box of rigatoni, $2.59 for sausage, $1.59 for sauce, and you have a meal and two lunches. I could have bought the boutique pasta with albino squid ink for $7.00, a specialty sauce for the same, and some ground lamb, but you just hate to think of lambs being ground. My lunches are pathetic, but inexpensive; I can feed myself for two weeks on burritos, cheese, jalapenos and hot sauce. No one wants to be around me, but that's okay. No, we bring it in for under $100. So enter now!

I realized something else about Wii Fit: not only do I not have to turn on the Wii Fit to step up and down, I can move the step someplace else. Honestly, I'm such an idiot. I stopped turning on the unit, but still did it in the same place, just listening to old radio shows. But once I realized I could take it upstairs, a whole new world opened up. I can watch all those shows I have stored away on the computer! The minutes just melt away. And I can't fast forward, so I have to enjoy every detail. Such as:
Yes, it's UFO, that curious Gerry Anderson show with the greatest theme and the worst costumes. (His wife designed them.) Things I didn't know until I googled: this guy . . .

. . . the straight-talking Yank via Derek-Jacobi-as-Claudius-via-David-Bowie who runs SHADO (an acronym I never forgot) was Ed Bishop, who also appeared as an astronaut in the opening sequence of “You Only Live Twice,” and was an astronaut on 2001 – he pilots the shuttle that goes to the monolith. And he did voice work for the animated Star Trek show, also known as “14 pieces of animation and three music cues reassembled into different shows.” I watched the first ep, which shows up one the key strategic mistakes in SHADO tactics. When a UFO is coming towards the moon, what do you do? Right: send up all three of your fighters, each of which has one missile, and fire them all at once, then let them sit there in a tight formation so the UFO can run into one of them.
By the way, in the future of 1980, spacecraft will be designed on the assumption that the cosmic void is actually an enormous, infinite koi pond:

Other fun facts: one of the moonbase crew members married Michael Caine in 1973... and they've been married ever since.
Another show I started to watch, but found boring right away: Mod Squad. Man, is it dated, and tiresome – all those bored contemptuous youth-type figures preaching against The Man. Doesn't matter that they're faking it so they can be seen as real on the street; it's just dull. But the opening sequence has some scenes from a Los Angeles burger joint:
Wonder where that was. Could it be this place?

–

Your links today would be a gruesome installment on Comic Sins, HERE, and the usual ol’ Bittersweet Nostalgia over at North Dakota Small Towns on Google Street View, HERE. As always, or rather usually, your links can be found over at Flotsam, and that concludes the daily reminder to bookmark that site just in case.

See you at tumblr, PopCrush, twitter, and some other platform just invented yesterday I probably signed up for.

54 RESPONSES TO moonbase is go

madCanada says:
September 21, 2010 at 4:54 pm

@ bg bear

“Funny how the futurists always missed the mark on how popular shorts would be in the later 20th and 21st century.”

Yeah, and that “tunic” revival prophesied by William Cameron Menzies … Near the date & still waiting.

lanczos says:
September 21, 2010 at 5:47 pm

Criminy ZAP! If Mercer, ND isn’t booming any more than is shown in the googuishot, I am DEVASTATED! I WAS PROMISED MUCH MORE!

As of Right Now, I am closing my savings account in First State Bank
and stuffing the greenbacks under my mattress. And loading the double-barreled shotgun, just in case…

buzz says:
September 22, 2010 at 9:18 am

@hpoulter — “…Stryker's swinging bachelor pad. As I recall it was really weird. For one thing, a large collection of dueling pistols mounted on the walls suggested a call to Dr Freud was in order…”

See previous post re disintegration of Gerry & Sylvia Anderson's marriage.

Doug Sundseth says:
September 22, 2010 at 9:43 pm

A part of my family is actually from Sheldon, ND. (One of my relatives created the Buelingo cattle breed, which might be Sheldon's only claim to fame.)

The Google Street View pictures actually seem a fair representation of what I remember of the town in summer: dusty, empty, and hot. In winter, of course, it would be windy, empty, and brutally cold.

I still remember the trips from Fargo/Moorhead to visit my Great Grandmother for holidays. Driving across old Lake Agassiz (and periodically climbing up another beach level), turning for no obvious reason at the correction lines, watching line after line of wind breaks pass in the heat or cold.

I have no regrets about living far from that area, but the memories remain.
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?
Just so you know, I don’t think that anything below is particularly special or clever, so it’s not like I think I’m passing off dog breath as the smell of fresh bread.

New theories about the brain – and there are always new theories about the brain – suggest that Vitamin D makes us happier. Or so I’m told. Lifts the mood, englades the soul. You mean the stuff you get from the sun? No news to me. I had a long period in my life when I liked cloudy moody weather because I was a Serious Person, and Serious People were prone to melancholy, and what better setting for the great drama of your own fascinating life than low clouds and mist in the distance? Some people always feel that way; some change; some decide that it’s all dark in the end, so you’d best luxuriate in the rays of a distant nuclear reaction while you can. I’m in the pro-sun camp, or Team Sun as the inane and endlessly annoying modern coinage has it, so yesterday and today made me Spring-Heeled Jack. But there was something else.

I’ve mentioned how I’m weeding out the iTunes? Right. It’s tiresome but it pays off – fixing all the tags on classical music, for example, is an exercise in brain-melting hair-pulling fury, because everyone enters information differently into the CD databases. Good. Lord. You rip a CD, and it comes back with every tempo in a movement entered in the ALBUM ARTIST field and the composer’s birthdate in the genre field. So I’m constructing playlists for every
composer, and unifying all the field styles. Now and then when I have a moment I’ll enter a keyword, see what comes up, and go full Stalin on the results. The end product, as far as I can tell, is a musical collection that reflects what I want to listen to, not what I have that I might someday need. The curse of the digital age is the blurring of the distinction between the two: you want to have it all, just in case. Not anymore. Out it goes.

(After I back up the discards, of course.)

This means it’s easier for me to turn on my iPod and find something I actually want to hear. Song after song, why, it’s something I like. “Ten thousand songs in your pocket” turns out to be a curse it turns out that I am perfectly content with a small amount of music. I used to have hundreds of songs from the 40s on my playlist, but it turns out I can boil it down to some 40s CDs I bought in the late 80s. Turns out they’re called “Best Of” for a reason.

But today at work I was going through the as-of-yet-unweeded techno playlist, and came across an album I had loved the moment I’d heard, and of course never listened to again because there was something else to be discovered and curated. To some ears I suppose it’s your typical floaty gassy synth-drivel with a beat and a voice, but when I walked outside into the sun, the combination between the music and the light and the mood was so marvelous I just stood in the parking lot until it was done. It was as happy as I’d felt in a long time.

There was something more behind it, too; I’d just decided to rework my daily vidcasts at the paper, because I truly could not stand to talk about celebrities any more. I just snapped, and more or less put a stake in the old format. You want to see someone pour his heart out? It’s here. The new version will be much more web-culture oriented, and I’m going to produce it at work instead of home, which means building a green screen studio of my own down in Studio A at the paper. So I went down to A to see what I could do; it was empty, no one shooting anything at the time, and I walked around for a while by myself recalling the events of a year ago, when we were winding up the new video project. Some of the boxes we opened to liberate new equipment are still there. There’s some stuff on a whiteboard about a project I did last February. There’s a green hat I used for a St. Patrick’s day broadcast. It seems like a very long time ago. All that is past, and all the agita and tsuris is over, and now I’m closer to doing exactly what I want to do. So it didn’t feel dead and sad as it had just a week or so again, when I was last down in A. I made the decision to take home boxes of stuff from my old desk and start the new desk from scratch. Legacy desk flair: it ties a man down.

So there you are. It’s all that simple. A good song and sun and a new direction and the illusion of progress to salve the wound of passing time, and you’re set. At least for the moment.

The rest of the day? We had the annual meatball dinner at church, which coincides with the annual “let’s all take a look at our contribution structure” chat. The meatballs are so good you can’t help but increase your pledge to
cover inflation.

Went home and wrote a Joe. Had a chat with daughter about WW2; she's watching some anime show that has something to do about World War 2 and wanted to know where Austria figured in the mix. She said the words I think every parent hears at some point: “Well what about Prussia?” So we talked about Prussia. It's one of those things a father just does. Then I worked on this and that, but to be utterly frank: Tuesday nights I don’t feel like pressing the pedal through the floorboards. Spent some time prepping a computer for office duty, which sounds dreadful unless you're as ill as I am, and then it's a great joy.

Updates: oh, this is good. Just go HERE and witness the birth of Jazz Hands.

As for the song: Looked it up on the playlist tonight, and it's called . . . Autumn Tactics. And here you go.
Pass it along, if you wish.

73 RESPONSES TO vitamin m

GardenStater says:
September 22, 2010 at 3:51 pm

Thanks, madCanada. But you may be surprised to know that I also believe in the innate sinfulness of humanity. It's the reason we needed a Savior.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
–1 John 1:7-8

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 22, 2010 at 3:57 pm

Well now madCanada, not to be contentious (with you anyway), but I seem to recall that Jesus did drive out some demons out of one of the afflicted, they were Legion by name. Their default host was in a herd of pigs who promptly imitated lemmings and ran off a cliff. So maybe swschrad's use of metaphor has some validity after all.

Having baled hay down wind of a few pig farms as teen, I find it a rather apt description of how the scent (or sin) can feel like it got absorbed into your very pores when I have failed to live and act well.

As for you Al, speak for yourself. WE all don't know deep down that there's nobody there to deliver anything. The fact that YOU seem to know all (not unlike Karnak the Magnificent) says more about YOU than the others you speak for.

madCanada says:
September 22, 2010 at 4:08 pm

I'm taking Al's side re absolute truth, but remain a curious investigator of theology as a useful tool/guide for living.

I hope nobody here is a Calvinist, that's all. What an absolutely despicable creed. I give all other strains of JudeoChristianity credit for believing that human thoughts/deeds are consequential, and that we each have the power and freedom to negotiate our standing with the creator/universe.

chrisbcritter says:
September 22, 2010 at 4:11 pm

Poor Bobby Van – died too young. Always liked him, though – even enough to forgive him for the '73 version of Lost Horizon.

And the podcast… you could have cut it at 0:15 and been just as effective. Still better then the local radio chat host who used half an hour of airtime with the same attitude toward LL and managed to say less than you did. (He tends to gripe about celebs making more money than “us regular folks”. He gets $30k a year for saying that.)
metaphizzle says:
September 22, 2010 at 4:42 pm

But today at work I was going through the as-of-yet-unweeded techno playlist, and came across an album I had loved the moment I’d heard, and of course never listened to again because there was something else to be discovered and curated. To some ears I suppose it’s your typical floaty gassy synth-drivel with a beat and a voice,

Bah, some of us are actually interested. What's the album?

madCanada says:
September 22, 2010 at 4:42 pm

If anyone reading this is a Calvinist, please speak up. I have some questions … and not just rhetorical/adversarial questions, I’m really trying to make sense of what you believe.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 22, 2010 at 4:54 pm

I personally think that Calvin would not pee on as many auto manufacturer’s logos as the numerous window stickers would indicate.

D Palmer says:
September 22, 2010 at 5:36 pm

Roger: ROTFLMAO

swschrad says:
September 22, 2010 at 5:38 pm

@bgbear: maybe Calvin has a picture of Ralph Nader on his wall 😄

there's also a herd of yellow snowmen to contend with in parsing this argument.

@MadCanada, Al Federer: as long as you have breath, it's never too late to change. WELS is not the only church group that believes scripture is divinely driven, as in God is dictating and don't mess it up, buddy, we're watching you closely.

I still personally have some small issues with 6 days and a nap, but when you consider how fast things happen at the business end of a particle accelerator, it could well be.

anybody who claims to have all the answers down here … well, most of them are not relevant to the questions asked. trust none who claim otherwise.

except ME, of course, your candidate for Benevolent Dictator. had enough politics? they're all liars and scoundrels? vote swschrad for Benevolent Dictator. you will be pleased, or else 😄

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 22, 2010 at 5:39 pm

I'm confused here, madCanada. I reviewed Herr Federber's snarky inputs, but failed to see anything referencing absolute truth or something even remotely like it. All I could find was a gaping hole of
disbelief. As for Calvinism, I grew up Protestant, but converted to Catholicism in my 40's. I saw plenty of disconnects between the very different catechisms of the two, but I am baffled by your assertion of negotiation. As for Calvinism, do you consider Isaac Newton, Christopher Wren, and a few other contemporaries I could mention despicable in their beliefs? Consider your answer carefully, because their fundamental religious underpinnings were those of Calvinism rather than Church of England.

madCanada says:
September 22, 2010 at 6:14 pm

@ Mark E Hurling, thanks for the heads-up on Wren & Newton. I'm playing catch-up on theology here and admittedly don't know everything. Gotta say, though, having visited London many times, Wren designed some pretty club-houses.

@ swschrad ... Worship/repent away. Be happy.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 22, 2010 at 7:20 pm

madCanada, your sense of honor and intellectual integrity do you proud. I'm always glad to communicate with you. I hope I can emulate you in this respect. I have to fight (really hard) to step back from my own strongly held beliefs and try to look at what I think is true with new eyes. You are to be commended.

Chas C-Q says:
September 22, 2010 at 7:41 pm

@metaphizzle: See the YouTube at the end of the article.

“Autumn Tactics” (vocals: Justine Suissa) is on the album _Behind the Sun_ by Chicane (AKA Nicholas Bracegirdle).

shesnailie says:
September 22, 2010 at 9:02 pm

“anybody who claims to have all the answers down here... well, most of them are not relevant to the questions asked. trust none who claim otherwise.”

_@_v – isn't The Answer™ forty-two?

raf says:
September 22, 2010 at 9:39 pm

This perpetual lack of results is successfully used by church management as justification for more of the same (pray harder, have more faith, give more money...).

I trust, then, that if we substitute “government” for “church” (and mutatis mutandis) you would still be just as cynical/skeptical.

Rubo says:
September 22, 2010 at 11:54 pm

Well Al, if you're right and we're wrong, we'll have maybe wasted some time and money going to church. But, if we're right and you're wrong, then you'll have an awful long time to think about it.
**Grebmar** says:
September 22, 2010 at 11:58 pm

Newton's religion is a topic that has occupied scholars for decades. It's not very easy to define, because he pretty much rejected _all_ Christian denominations as having been corrupted since the time of Arius in the fourth century. There's been some debate lately, but it was likely that Newton followed Arius and denied the trinity. I'm not sure, but he also likely did not favor the predestination of Calvinism, but he did predict the end of the world based on intensive scrutiny of Biblical chronology (it will happen around 2050—look out!).

**Grebmar** says:
September 23, 2010 at 12:06 am

I've been in Europe for a while, and it's interesting how the ads showing up on all my usual places are all in German now. At the top of the Bleat right now is an ad that says, basically:

“Your girlfriend is right here right now” with an arrow pointing at a generic park somewhere. Underneath the picture it says you can send them her cell number to get an exact location. 15 times for free!

Creepy. I haven’t seen that kind of ad in the states.

**Dave (in MA)** says:
September 23, 2010 at 1:26 am

I'm a Calvinist.
Love those snowmen.

**wombat-socho** says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:22 am

Thanks for the Chicane song. (I bought the CD.) In return, I'd like to submit for your possible approval an Australian DJ yclept Aaron Static, who does a monthly Power Hour podcast of progressive/house/trance/dance stuff. I think you might like it, or at least find some tracks of interest.

**Mark E. Hurling** says:
September 23, 2010 at 10:05 am

@Grebmar, I suppose we could debate this at some length and stil not convince each other. But (and this is just my opinion) when you look at Newton's journals from his earliest days from childhood, and see some of the entries and how he seeks to list his sins and redress them with terribly great detail and specificity, it seems to me his very nature was infused with a very Calvinistic approach to redemption. As for predestination, his mechanistic approach to the universe, gravity, et. al. seem to line right up with the concept. If you examine Newton next to his arch rival in these theories of universal physics Liebniz, this leaps out at you. Or it did to me anyway. YMMV.

I agree, he came dangerously close to being accused of heresy because his rather guarded remarks about Arianism, but I'm not enough of a theologian to be sure that the one excludes him from adherence with regard to the other.
nixmom says:
September 23, 2010 at 1:51 pm

Actually, in our family, we really *did* have a “well, what about Prussia?” conversation, when the eldest learned that our last name is not (gasp!) German, as he had once been told. It’s Prussian. Having never heard of Prussia, well, off we went.

Bottom line? “So, basically, we’re German?”

Well, yes. Basically.

podder_n9 says:
September 24, 2010 at 2:34 am

Hello Mr Lileks! Sad as it is, I missed a blog and when I went to have my say, there were already Jesus comments there. Even you sir it seems are not immune and leads me to the theory that this is perhaps the shelf life freshness indicator for web posts- when the hapless Bible quoters and Dawkins thumping atheists rear their mushoomy little heads. Where was I? Yes, playlist trimming… I was moved by your comments on the subject as I am a chronic curator myself and spend much time on this task. I hope you see it also as the good exercise that I do- cleaving the difference between the mechanical, practical thinking of “I might need this” to the more centered choices of what truly moves us. It is an art of knowing where to draw the lines in the most personal way (and it's been said that is all art really is) rather than saving hard drive space or something similarly mechanical.

Greetings to the Twin Cities and Huzzah! to you, Mr. Lileks.

“For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.” 1 Corinthians 4:20, just sayin.
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

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Thanks for dropping by! Feel free to join the discussion by leaving comments, and stay updated by subscribing to the RSS feed. That's the default copy from the developers! I'm just adding this, and will add something more, later. Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
I'm sitting outside in the gazebo in the dark, in the rain. The leaky gazebo. Which is fun to say. Try it. Almost sounds like some mobster nick: Tommy “Leaky” Gazebo. It's supposed to rain steadily all night, with flooding predicted someplace I'm not. The only way it could flood here would be a tsunami rolling off the Mississippi, because I'm on a hill. Actually, no, I'm not – the street just turns into a valley, heading down to the creek. If you're down there it looks like a hill. From here it looks like a valley. There's a lesson in life there, you know. Think about it.

And that's as deep as I'll get today. It was an ordinary day, made all the more super-ordinary by the move to a new indistinguishable cubicle. This is my . . . seventh, yes, seventh. The best desk was 1999 – 2002. I loved that desk. It's gone now. After I was moved to someplace non-specific I was filed in the absolute butt-end of the office, and after that I took my stuff and moved up to the multimedia department and didn't get official approval. Because I'm a rebel! I don't cotton to your rules, man! Set up my own shop, then moved to an official cubicle while I was attached to the video news section, and then they removed all those desks to build out the photographer's area. I came to work last week and my desk was just gone. Shed no tears. My co-worker was gone months ago, so no more amusing conversations over the fence. For the last week I squatted in an empty desk that had a phone so encrusted with boogerism I thought someone had sneezed a mouthful of rice-pudding on the thing sixteen years ago. Today I finally got to my new desk, and spent some time hosing it all down and wiping off the grot, the human accumulations,
that seem to cover things in an office. Put up my pictures, such as they are. Ran ethernet cables where I wanted them to go. Arranged a few items just . . . so. And that was that.

**Damn:** I had a peeve. I know I did. Was all set to ramble on about it, too. Wait, it'll come to me.

Shoot! C'mon! Can't be the school bus that was late, and I mean really, really late. There's a bus that comes to the same spot a few minutes before, but I can always tell it's not the right one because the parents on the corner who've come to scoop up the tots don't disperse, and the merry cries of children do not fill the air like the joyous keening of birds sprung from a cage, wheeling around in the autumn sun, looking for a rodent to pierce with their talons and carry off, dripping, to eat someplace else. Okay, I took that one too far. But today the bus came and went and I didn't pay it much attention, since I was sitting up on the steps on top of the . . . valley-top place, looking at my iPad, reading a Sherlock Holmes story. (Never read any of them before. Enjoying it.)

Then it got late. There weren't any parents down at the corner, either. It was raining, so maybe that was it. Let the little brats run for it! But then it got very late, and I had that queasy oh-shite feeling you get when things tick past the point of reasonable delays, and enter the realm where you extrapolate catastrophe. So I walked down to the corner with an umbrella as I could summon the bus. Down the hill from the other side came a Mom I'd never seen before, and I asked if she was here for the bus. She was picking up someone else's kids. They were supposed to come to her house, but as the minutes ticked by, she went down to investigate, and I imagine she had that small blooming kernel of doubt as well: this isn't right.

So we chatted for five minutes, if a bit stiffly, since, you know, our kids were GONE FOREVER – well, mine, and the one she would be blamed for not saving from their fate, because by now we figured ninjas in green camouflage had stolen them – but then the bus lumbered around the corner. The driver, who is always late, and always has an excuse, excused her lateness by citing Twins traffic. A game had gotten out, and snarled up things on her other route. Well, it's one of those one-in-a-million things, I guess. A game letting out. Who could predict?

Up the walk from the bottom of the valley to the house; made her hot chocolate and asked how school was (fine) and whether there was homework (no) and then I remembered that I'd had a nightmare about the Forever Alone face, and asked her if she'd seen it. She had not. I called it up on the laptop. She said she wished I hadn't. Well, I'd rather she learn these memes at home than on the street.
Oh: now I remember. It's connected to Forever Alone, in a way. The institutionalized crudity of these drawings is one thing; the one-joke stupidity of rageguy is another, and the four-panel “Exploitable” format is a genre all its own, and has its own unique sense of timing and set-up. So there's that. It's a series of jokes that all have the same visual punchline, and the humor is derived by knowing the punchline before you even read the cartoon. This may be something new. This may be a form of humor where the amusement comes not from a twist or a retort, but a stock conclusion that isn't funny unless you know why it's supposed to be funny. Because it's Forever Alone guy.

It'll burn itself out, like they all do, and people in 2013 will be nostalgic for it. Nostalgia for memes is the new form of mental homesickness.

But that wasn't the peeve. The peeve came from an episode of “X-Minus One” I listened to on the way to work. Third season. Not enough space ships. Too many “funny” episodes set in a future that's just 1959 plus buttons and robots with tinny voices who don’t use contractions and references to “telescreens” and “data tapes.” We're so much better at imagining the technology of the future now, and no one would think to write a story about 2800 that's just an exaggeration of today, with all the tics and terms of 1959 projected into an era where people wear unitards and have numbers for names.

The problem with the show is the acting – oh, it's often quite fine for the period and medium, but they use the same actors over and over again.

There's one guy who plays an older fellow, often a figure of authority, and another who plays a type I believe emerged in the 50s. He is:


Now. I believe this was a totally new male archetype, and it came out of the 50s, and it's all tied back to Catcher in the Rye. The same pose of ineffectual contempt for the phonies, the same brittle armor of self-deprecation matched with faith in the sharp point of your own withering insight. It is an adolescent posture, but it flattered the loners and the iconoclasts and the 97-lb. weaklings. They were nerds who didn’t have computers or the internet to find their brethren, so they sat in the drug store lunch counter and drank Cokes and read sci-fi mags and bit their nails and sneered at the big bluff
popular guys and fantasized about Peggy Sue being interested in the possibility of life on Venus.

Or so I concluded; may be nonsense. The episode is here. Everything about it screams FIFTIES.

So! Have a grand day; back tomorrow with lots and lots of stuff. See you around.

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**45 RESPONSES TO forever sarcastic**

hpoulter says:
September 23, 2010 at 5:36 am

Did he really say he had never read a Sherlock Holmes story? I am gob-smacked.

SCOTTtheBADGER says:
September 23, 2010 at 5:40 am

Forever Alone guy looks like a rather tasty potato chip to me. Perhaps Old Dutch can give him a job as a mascot, when the strip fails.

bobjpton says:
September 23, 2010 at 5:48 am

How delightful to have never read Sherlock Holmes. Now James can read them for the first time.

Bob

Michael Rittenhouse says:
September 23, 2010 at 6:36 am

Good call on the “Norman Bates in Greenwich Village” archetype. He probably was something entirely new, the byproduct of a phenomenally prosperous and comfortable society, like Libertarians.

He had a little brother in the '60s: the nebbish, brought to the stage by Dustin Hoffman, Woody Allen, and Richard Dreyfuss.

hpoulter says:
September 23, 2010 at 7:11 am

Hey, easy on the blanket put-down of libertarians, bub. You may be quite mistaken about who they are and what they believe (not to mention, it's a mighty broad category with no canonical definition or party discipline). I'm pretty sure Holden Caulfield wasn't one. He was just a self-dramatizing brat.

To me a libertarian, whether “right” or “left”, is someone who believes the government, especially the federal government, should
have less to do with running our lives, and should be constrained to
act within narrowly defined limits. It can actually be compatible
with personally held “cultural conservative” beliefs as well as
“cultural liberal” beliefs, as long as both sides can agree that not
everything that is wrong should be prohibited by Federal law, and
not everything that is good should be made mandatory. As
Instapundit says “small government is the big tent”.

Wagner von Druppen- Sachs says:
September 23, 2010 at 7:49 am

Are we supposed to know what he's talking about, in re “Forever
Alone,” or is that our research project for the day?

Scott says:
September 23, 2010 at 7:56 am

Did he just say that his “peeve” today (yesterday) was the quality of
acting on a '50's radio show? In the same post that he goes on about
how the Forever Alone internet meme has become tiresome?

hpoulter says:
September 23, 2010 at 7:57 am

You can research the “Forever Alone” “meme”, but take it from one
who did – it’s not worth it. Re-reading anything on lileks.com would
be infinitely more rewarding.

Brisko says:
September 23, 2010 at 7:59 am

I've had many desks at my work, too. When I started, I was given a
desk and two days later told I had to move because a senior
manager wanted to use it for storage (seriously) as it was near his
office. My next desk was actually a near window, which was nice,
and I had it for about 6 months before being moved to a dungeon.
Was forcibly moved to a couple different places in the dungeon
before getting an awesome desk with my own private window
facing the lake, and no sharing of walls with anyone. It was Heaven
and I got to keep it for a year and a half.

And a month ago, I got drafted for a brand new project (as I have
experience quickly ramping up effed up projects) and now I have a
terrible desk, on a floor I've never worked on before, with a view of
the parking lot and many cube mates I cannot stand.

I hate cubicles.

Jennifer says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:17 am

My greatest desk was in a cubicle; the cube was open on the side,
and I could turn to the left and look out a window. This was in the
GM building in NYC, and my view was of most of Central Park. I was
at that job for only six months (hated that job), but it was during one
of the greatest autumns NYC ever had–the colors were amazing. I
hated the job because I had little to do, so I spent a lot of time gazing
out that window. Crap job. Great desk.
Gene Dillenburg says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:21 am

“Who could predict” indeed. A baseball game can take anywhere from 2 to 4 hours to play, even longer. The Twins playing a day game on a weekday is fairly rare — I count less than a dozen all year. And with the Twins in the thick of a pennant race (they clinched the division the night before — congratulations), the crowd was quite large, 40,000-plus.

If James wishes to remain ignorant of baseball, that is his choice. But to hold others in contempt for not sharing his ignorance is…not nice.

GardenStater says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:26 am

@jennifer: My best workspace was in the mid-80s, when I worked for HBO. We moved into the (then brand-new) HBO Building on the corner of 42nd and 6th in 1984. (Each desk came with an ashtray—how times have changed.) I had an office on the 5th floor, overlooking Bryant Park, right behind the NY Public Library. The Empire State Building was framed in my window, and if I worked late I could watch the lights come on.

Now I work in a cubicle, in a suburban NJ office. My view is of grey filing cabinets.

As I say, times have changed.

FreeState says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:43 am

I work in a windowless office. Which I actually prefer (aside from the lousy radio reception). Compared to the window offices, the interior offices are quieter, much more temperature stable, and I don't have the issue of sunlight causing glare on my screen.

As for Sherlock Holmes, I tried reading the entire collection a while back. I stopped about halfway through. They are very frustrating stories for anyone used to modern detective stories. The difference is that in Holmes, we are just supposed to marvel at his cleverness, but we ourselves are never allowed to try and solve the crime.

Typically, Watson will ask Holmes at the end how he solved the case, and Holmes will go through all the steps. But, we have never seen most of those clues before. The typical reaction is “What? Where did that come from?” So, I got frustrated and gave up. I have no regrets.

Lars Walker says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:54 am

At first I was shocked at the Holmes lacuna in our host's reading experience, but after a moment's thought I agree with boblipton: How delightful to be able to discover Holmes for the first time!

John says:
September 23, 2010 at 9:18 am

I see that the Croatian Air Force, which had 12 MiG's, 4 of which were able to to fly, now has 10 and 2 respectively because of a couple of crashes today. A Slovene blogger suggested the word
“pilots” was inaccurate; “stokers” might be better, and maybe they were in fact Bosnian. I mention this partly because it takes some hard-workin’ bigotry to crack an ethnic joke in a land where all ethnicities look the same, but mainly because as much as Eastern Europeans ape Americanisms, they still don’t use the word “meme.” Nor do I. I still have absolutely no idea what the word means, and am content to wait for a Brazilian blogger to explain it to me someday. Meanwhile, count me out of Team Meme.

Above-average Bleat, though, all the same. I like a dense Bleat: not much scrollin’, no photos of groceries, Gnat’s home and dry, and the comments are all over the place. And the encrusted-phone reference is like… rice pudding on the cake!

juanito - John Davey says:
September 23, 2010 at 9:21 am

Every office I’ve had for the past 12 years has been windowless. Bumped around in our original building from 1998 through 2003 in 4 distinct offices. Moved to the new building we bought in 2004 to a fantastic room with dedicated air, and an abundance of power, but my row of nearby server racks began to erode my hearing. At end of 2006 we bought another Agency, and moved into that building (to save money) and that is where I sit today. As I mentioned in my response to James on Twitter, after our company’s layoff chronicles of 2008 – 2009 I am now the sole occupant of a space set up for 43 desks, so I have of my choice of 43 grot encrusted phones. Everyone else is on the other side of the building. All of my voice and data facilities are centered there, so it’s too costly to re-wire, and modify the HVAC to move to a new spot. And I still have one of my three server racks at my elbow, so I am borderline deaf.

And, shocker, still windowless.

Lileks

I believe this was a totally new male archetype, and it came out of the 50s, and it’s all tied back to Catcher in the Rye. The same pose of ineffeetual contempt for the phonies, the same brittle armor of self-deprecation matched with faith in the sharp point of your own withering insight. It is an adolescent posture, but it flattered the loners and the iconoclasts and the 97-lb. weaklings.

I blame Steinbeck, the true sire of Holden Caulfield. Sure, Steinbeck’s characters were imbued with more noble motives, and a grander sense of decency, but from Holden Caulfield on, they were the descendants of Steinbeck’s put-upon-men, with without any of the self realization. Because that’s the cool aspect of a noble rebel. The complete lack of a sense of nobility.

hpoulter says:
September 23, 2010 at 9:31 am

Meme is a meme.

Crabtree says:
September 23, 2010 at 10:09 am

My English professor defined it as an idea that is transmitted like a gene. Personally, I have never found that very helpful in explaining the concept to people. I tend to use the phrase, “A meme is like a contagious thought virus; easily transmitted, possibly annoying,
inexplicable to anyone who hasn’t caught it, and always hard to get rid of.”

**Mark E. Hurling** says:
September 23, 2010 at 10:11 am

A tsunami on the Mississippi? Just hope that the New Madrid fault in Missouri doesn’t decide to kick up it’s heels in a big way. You just might see one then.

**swschrad** says:
September 23, 2010 at 10:36 am

the way to deal with phone sludge is to just grab a couple containers of disinfecting wipes, and scrub it until the wipes come clean. then wipe off with a paper towel.

if that was too much crud and it doesn’t work afterwards, grab another junk phone and repeat.

don’t know if you ever did that junior high “wipe the phone and grow the germs” science deal, but news is the keyboard is the new king of contagion. if you don’t believe me, turn yours upside down and rap the back. that’s just the lunch crumbs.

**JerseyAmy** says:
September 23, 2010 at 10:52 am

“Hi, James. What’s going on? Uh, we’re gonna need to move your desk downstairs into Storage B. Uh, we have some new people coming in and we need all the space we can get. And if you could could go ahead and get a can of pesticide and take care of the roach problem we’ve been having, that would be great. Mmmkay?”

**Spud** says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:15 am

@Brisko: You will be assimilated into the Cube. Resistance is futile.

Like Juanito, I fear I have experienced some hearing loss due to server fan/hum noise. I suppose it could be old age and/or the “payback” of too many heavy metal concerts in my yute. Ted Nugent was particularly damaging, and I was too stupid to not have hearing protection back then. Kinda wish now I had used some ear plugs.

**Wagner von Drupen-Sachs** says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:27 am

You can wipe down the phone, but that’s just the surface. You also have all those little holes in the mouthpiece (and earpiece sometimes =:O) that need to be reamed with a toothpick or something. The old ‘phones you could just unscrew but the new ones need to be prised apart. Me, I would just see if I could swap handsets with my old unit.

**JamesS** says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:29 am

Our Dear Author is a tough audience. A quick check of the episodes for the ’57 season of *X Minus One* shows a veritable *Who’s Who of*

Maybe not Heinlein/Asimov/Clarke, but hey…

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:33 am

everyone going on about their desks and having a window view, what a bunch of phonies.

hpoulter says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:40 am

Thanks, Holden Bearfield.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:55 am

All morons hate it when you call them a moron.

swschrad says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:55 am

my cubicle is at the end of the workgroup, facing away. very tiny faraway view of something that might be sky around other people's 40th floors, and might be window sludge. I have two confusers, a floor support post, and no file cabinet because of the post. there are two cable trays above my head, and four fire sprinkler heads.

I now do have an “assistive” headset amp for my phone because of too many years of cars with no a/c and a window open, and 5 years of working in equipment rooms with steam pressure reducers and air handling units.

but there's challenge in the cubicle, and the paychecks don't bounce, so in I come every day, the co-workers (not cow-irkers ™ ) are good folks. we get treated like adults until we prove otherwise here. and those are 4 good reasons to get off break and get back after issues.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:59 am

Spud says:
September 23, 2010 at 11:15 am

Like Juanito, I fear I have experienced some hearing loss due to server fan/hum noise. I suppose it could be old age and/or the “payback” of too many heavy metal concerts in my yute. Ted Nugent was particularly damaging, and I was too stupid to not have hearing protection back then. Kinda wish now I had used some ear plugs.

Sure, youthful music level intransigence has contributed to my hearing loss. But I know, KNOW, that the server racks over the years have been the largest source.

I've talked to Ted Nugent, and yes his hearing is very degraded. As a
bonus, I was at the Sacramento Memorial Auditorium when Ted cracked the ceiling (and like Felix Unger, was asked to never return). Glorious.

fizzbin says:
September 23, 2010 at 12:17 pm

“..an idea that is transmitted like a gene.." I always thought that was a stupid way of explaining what a meme is. I mean, I'm no Eyenstine but I believe that in order to transmit genes ya hafta, well, ya know, do...IT. I think most professors are pervs😊

Anyway, ..a contagious thought virus, etc", is much more succinct.

Uncle Joe says:
September 23, 2010 at 12:25 pm

swschrad says:

the keyboard is the new king of contagion.

Ah, but what does not kill us only makes us stronger.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 23, 2010 at 12:44 pm

I think the touch screens on our copiers and fax machines at work must be crawling with microbes.

John says:
September 23, 2010 at 1:01 pm

OK – I'm set on memes. Thanks. No Brazilian blogger need intervene now, though if one did, and defined the things simply as pensamentos incompletos, I'd say fair enough.

Never have read any S. Holmes stuff. Until recently, never had read any J. Bond stuff either. To the latter I responded as a dog to a card trick. If 52-Pickup is a card trick. I gazed unmoved, and could not see how anyone thought this clunky material might be turned into, not merely flicks, but action flicks. Was it exciting in a strictly Fifties way?

Maharincess of Franistan says:
September 23, 2010 at 1:18 pm

One of my favorite offices was a large cubicle with window walls on 2 sides. I remember it fondly because the year I occupied it coincided with the year Los Angeles got an additional area code. I was in NYC, and if people in NYC wanted to call sleaze-emporium Frederick's of Hollywood and forgot to dial 1 first, they got me. Boy, did I have fun with that.

Cubicle Protest/Drinking Song (UPDATED) « Cultural Rumbles says:
September 23, 2010 at 2:55 pm

[..] 1: More cubicle blues: And that's as deep as I'll get today. It was an ordinary day, made all the more super-ordinary [...]

http://lileks.com/bleat/?p=8060
Pete Madsen says:
September 23, 2010 at 6:31 pm

I worked in a chemistry lab in a shipyard, so had quite a succession of desks. My first bullpen had more people than desks, so I learned to operate out of my briefcase, which I plunked down on the desk of whoever was gone or on backshift that day. Then they decommissioned a lab that had been a controlled surface contamination area, and I scrounged a desk, moved it in there, and after noticing that there was a window on the outside of the building, hacksawed away part of the wallboard. It was a high window that hadn't been washed since Harry Truman visited the shipyard, with cyclone fence wiring over it, but it was a window.

ArganikMark says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:12 pm

Recently heard an interview with a research scientist who said that only about 10% of a person is actually human cell. 90% is microbial material, bacteria good and bad, etc. The most interesting and I suppose disturbing part, was a patient who had c. difficile, a profligation of bad bacteria that can prove fatal. Happens in nursing homes most often. She was cured by a fecal transplant supplied by her husband (bring on the colony of good bacteria!) I guess my point is, these are everywhere, in fact, they are us. No harm in the disinfectant wipes, but building immunities is probably wise, too.

grs says:
September 23, 2010 at 8:36 pm

James,

Just be sure to read the S. Holmes stories in order (shouldn’t be a problem for an obsessive/compulsive) or you'll wonder what in the heck The Adventure of the Empty House is all about.

shesnailie says:
September 23, 2010 at 9:07 pm

_@_v – the greatest meme was the one where doris gets razzed...

Sorcerer Mickey says:
September 23, 2010 at 9:51 pm


Doesn't he typically describe himself early in some episodes as being “well-adjusted”? 

lindal says:
September 23, 2010 at 10:13 pm

And lo, I predict a moment in James' future where the blog post title is, “What? Snakes don't have ears!” I've loved all the Holmes stories since I was nine. Talk about interrupting the suspension of disbelief. I have terrible grey cube and listen to people eat Doritos all day. Which leads to a lot of business travel. I've grown my nails long so that my typing is especially noisy.
GardenStater says:
September 23, 2010 at 10:40 pm

@shesnailie: “the greatest meme was the one where doris gets razzed...”

Wow, you're not kidding. That one went on forever. What fun we had at the Buzz.

I miss Lance.

TByrd says:
September 24, 2010 at 3:28 am


Brian Lutz says:
September 24, 2010 at 3:37 am

Well, better to have her find out about Internet memes this way than from other sources. After all, if that was to happen, there's a good chance that you would be disappoint.

RPD says:
September 24, 2010 at 7:51 am

Once when I was going on a six month deployment I acquired several of the Bond novels to read while our ship was floating in the middle of nowhere for weeks on end. I only made through one before donating the rest to the ship's library. I too am amazed someone thought these would make good action movies. I would’ve thought Dirk Pitt would have been more suitable but that character never really took off in the movies. Good thing I'm not a producer.

My office? A room in the basement in the middle of the building that I share with the printers, racks, phone system, and worst of all, the burster, which for those who don’t know, separates tractor feed forms and strips the tractor feed tabs off the side. It sounds remarkably like a jackhammer.
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! [...]
Ah, Friday! Friday, with its tripartite boon – the nap, the pizza, the Friday night sip of fine American bourbon! The night in which care and caution are thrown to the wind, and I redesign sites while watching a movie out of the corner of my eye!

Good Lord, what a wet Thursday. The rain rolled over the night before, howled and pelted and whistled and pounded down throughout the night, reminding you there's nothing like an autumn storm. It has nothing of summer about it. It sounds like winter, practicing. Everything felt sodden this morning – you expected people in the newspaper front-page photos to look like people fished out of the Atlantic with a hooked pole after a shipwreck – and then the rain came down with confident vigor again. The tops of the towers downtown rose into the mist and disappeared, a sight that always makes me wonder if it's better to live in a place with a few tall buildings, or a place with too many to count. If you have six or seven skyscrapers, you known them well from all angles; you know them in all the moods of the seasons, the times of day. A city with block after block of enormous towers is inspirational, but it inspires delusions as well. You imagine you're important because you stride among the halls of the giants; you imagine you're significant because you live among significant objects. I always remember the lessons I get from visits to New York. When I get there I am on top of the world. After a few days I am gum on the hell of a beast who didn't even hear my bones crack when it stepped on me.
After a pathetic lunch I went across the street for a small evil cigar, or rather one-third of one; there's shelter under the skyway from the rain, and you can walk across the street under the elevated walkway without getting wet. I had my iPod, Beethoven's 3rd piano concerto, my favorite. Stood there for a while, misted by the wind, reading tweets, the empty building to my back. The skyway goes to a Star-Tribune annex, a building we shut down and evacuated – well, the other way around, at least I hope so. There's no one home. It will be knocked down some day, and no loss; it's architecturally indistinct.

Oh, hell, here's where I was:

Roll that around 360 and you have my world – although the empty parking lot indicates they swung by on an early weekend morning. That's my lot in life, so to speak. If you go up and down the block you'll see what I mean about the annex. Compare it to the 1947 building:

I love that facade, even if it does recall the styles of Fascist modernism. The
original old bones of the newspaper office, the structure around which they wrapped the new building, is here – but obscure:

Once there was life around here – a block of low-slung commercial buildings across the street, a hospital with a steady stream of supplicants, square-jawed docs and crisply starched nurses, and so on. Everything fell away. Now we sit at the edge of downtown, unconnected to the skyway; in the winter it’s a hike across the frosty barren plain, past a parking ramp and a jail, just to get into the southernmost node of the skyway system. Hence I’ve never felt part of it, which makes me sad. Given my druthers I would wander it daily like Boswell with a skinful prowling London.

Ah well.

At least it’s warm. I took out the recycling tonight, and spread my arms Zorba-style to inhale the humidity. I know I’ve begun to reach some sort of rapprochement with this year’s iteration of autumn, because I applied some aerosol aromas to the kitchen, and chose AUTUMN BRANDED ODORS. My wife made something for her Bunco party that was seemingly made mostly of onions and garlic, and the smell hung like the ghost of someone murdered with great violence. So I went to the cabinet where I kept room sprays, and discovered a rather remarkable collection I’d accumulated over the years. Each one a representative of a trip to Southdale with Natalie, I’m sure; she likes to go to the candle store to smell things, and I always end up buying something that has a note of Leaves or Wreath or Autumn Bonfire. I’m now at the point in life where I no longer have nostalgia for the smell of burning leaves, but for the early years in her childhood when I went through a variety of candles and sprays to attempt to duplicate the smell of burning leaves.

It would have been easier to burn leaves. But such things are not permitted. And so we have a generation of people who have a memory of a memory, a series of electrical states stored deep in the old wet grey potato on our shoulders (note: the idea of the brain as “the grey potato” is, I believe, a line
from a poem of my old college poetry instructor, and I remember it partly because a fellow who was his Arch Enemy who hung around the coffeeshop where I wrote made great derisive sport of the man and cited that line as one of those auto-damning things he was too foolish to realize. I should also note that the poet is still around, and I plan to interview him for a Strib feature soon, and as I noted in a Bleat a few months ago, the Arch Enemy was sent up the river for enticing a young girl. So.)

The smell is gone but we'd know it in a second if it wafted through the neighborhood again. We might think: das ist verboten! And then we would drink it in, deep, and let it all come back: apples, red-plaid-jacket-with-the-elastic-around-the-wrists, gonna be Spiderman for Halloween, wet leaves plastering the lawn, the strange feeling you get on the walk home from school and you see the name of the concrete contractor with the ancient date of 1957, the minor chord in your piano lesson this week, the feelings you get when you walk past the first-grade class on your way out of 6th grade and you feel old – it's good, it's sad – and all the other wraiths that assemble on a fall day and pat you on the back. It's not a reassurance, you realize eventually – it's just a hand that guides you gently towards the vault of winter.

Links today, as promised – there's a small addition to the Gallery of Regrettable Foods, here.

100 Mysteries is just too lame to mention, but I'm doing it anyway, if you're one of the completists. Here. And here.

There's a six-page update to 1930s ads, kicking off the soft-drink section. WHY DO I DO THIS? I do not know. It's here.

Bleatplus, for subscribers: Dell-fever continues!
Another Strib column I like, somewhere [here](http://lileks.com/bleat/).

See you around the usual places; have a grand weekend! And as ever: thank you for your patronage.

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**32 RESPONSES TO the mists**

**Crabtree** says:
September 24, 2010 at 8:38 am

Oops, the links for the movies are bad. They are:
http://lileks.com/institute/100mysteries/93.html
http://lileks.com/institute/100mysteries/94.html

Just reading what you said about old memories brought back my own of elementary school and I’ll probably be lost in those sights, smells, and sounds for the rest of my day…

**Gibbering Madness** says:
September 24, 2010 at 8:58 am

And then we would drink it in, deep, and let it all come back: apples, red-plaid-jacket-with-the-elastic-around-the-wrists, gonna be Spiderman for Halloween, wet leaves plastering the lawn, the strange feeling you get on the walk home from school and you see the name of the concrete contractor with the ancient date of 1957, the minor chord in your piano lesson this week, the feelings you get when you walk past the first-grade class on your way out of 6th grade and you feel old – it's good, it's sad – and all the other wraiths that assemble on a fall day and pat you on the back. It's not a reassurance, you realize eventually – it's just a hand that guides you gently towards the vault of winter.

Reading Lileks is like watching Zeus do really neat card tricks, and then, every so often, hurl a thunderbolt.

**Mr_Hat** says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:00 am

Fortuitous typo re the great beast aside, wow. New extra-concentrated high definition Bleat-double-plus.

**AnnaN** says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:05 am

You so bemoan the beginning of the Minnesota winter season (and I'm right there with you) that it actually stunned me when you re-fi ed the house. I certainly had you pegged as moving out to Arizona prior to Natalie starting junior high.

I applaud your fortitude and will use it as an example when my husband and I begin the planned relocation from Colo to either MN or MA (trading in the physical comforts of the state for the emotional comfort of being near family).
Lars Walker says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:06 am

100 Mysteries is indeed too lame to mention, as are most broken links.

Bonnie_ says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:20 am

Thanks once again for your Friday essay, and reminding me that simple pleasures are always the ones worth cherishing.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:20 am

I am *just* old enough to remember burn barrels in Metro Sacramento neighborhoods. Must have ended by 1973, since I only recall my younger brother (6 Of 7 in our Borg collective) witnessing them with me, and not my youngest brother.

Was shocked to find them in use in Red Bluff CA in 1991 when I was traveling through the city to the home of one of our clients. My initial impression of the practice in 1991: Stone Age.

The Clown House in the Storybook Land of The Dells instantly made me recall the lyrics:

Oh yes, I'm the great pretender
Just laughing and gay like a clown
I seem to be what I'm not you see
I'm wearing my heart like a crown

Pretending to be a clown, because really they are a soul and flesh devouring death cult. Or sumpthin.


Perrier certainly is a long lived brand. I recall ringing in New Year's 1980 with a few bottles. Salty.

Drink Budweiser for Health and Nourishment? No FDA or FCC regulations in force back in the 30s?

The Father Of Jason Robard would be an eclectic band name, no?

Crabtree says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:23 am

There's just a bit of extra stuff after the addresses. Just delete anything after the .html and you are good to go.

Wagner von Drupen- Sachs says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:24 am

You can get Mysteries 93 and 94, for what they're worth, by editing out everything after “html” in the URL.
Wagner von Drupen-Sachs says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:25 am

Crabtree and Drupen-Sachs in speed typing contest. Crabtree FTW!

John says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:33 am

Yes, I am a completist, and I edited the <br /> off the 100 Mysteries URL's, and...small was my reward. Ah well, no regrets. OK, few regrets.

The '30's ads make me think of The Razor's Edge. Gray Maturin drinks Perrier and whiskey. And Somerset Maugham and Larry Darrell allude to Eleonora Duse at one point.

ken lay says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:41 am

Don't begrudge the rain too much. We're suffering through a drought here in cincinnati, with a record high of 95 on the first day of autumn. I water and water the plants, and I just feel like I'm prolonging their suffering...

Hunkybobtx says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:43 am

“Stay on the Alkaline side”. There's a capital parody of the Lou Reed song lurking there!

Re: the departure of summer, Here on the upper Texas coast, we Get cold fronts again, which we see very few of after April. It time for Octoberfest and the like. Those who are passionate about football have their thing.
Our winters are mild, but have their uncomfortable side. Weeks on end of cold overcast skies, punctuated with cold fronts that blow hard from the North, and empty the bays, leaving lots of smelly mud flats.

Patrick McClure says:
September 24, 2010 at 9:58 am

“the Friday night sip of fine American bourbon!” Bourbon can ONLY be made in Kentucky, so the sentence should be “the Friday night sip of fine Kentucky bourbon!” Other, lesser, whiskies can be made anywhere. Even that pretender which refers to itself as a “bourbon whiskey” recognizes this. But bourbon? Only from my fine Commonwealth.

swschrad says:
September 24, 2010 at 10:25 am

leaf burning is evil, simply evil. the whanging headaches and splitting sinuses from it are the devil's doormat.

a little oak and maple in the firepit on a crisp, clear fall night, however, is worth staying up a little late for.

and with dark at 7 pm these days, getting off the bus and having supper feels like closing down one bar after another in old n'orluns.
bgbear (roger h) says:
September 24, 2010 at 10:25 am

We live CA but, in the county and get to burn in the winter and spring, yard waste only.

Now at my mother-in-law's in rural Idaho we get to burn like crazy. Last fall and winter I was there we burned leaves, weeds, garbage, trees, telephones poles ha,ha,ha. . .

Some men just want to watch the world burn

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 24, 2010 at 10:27 am

As so often occurs our Genial Host evokes the unexpected with his writings. That description of the tops of the buildings disappearing into the mist made me think of a nice little movie “Fly Away Home.” An 14 year old girl guides a flock of Canada Geese on an ultralight to their wintering grounds on in the southern U.S. At one point they stray through Baltimore in a thick fog with her and the geese banking narrowly between high rises in the fog. Also a very funny scene where they get escorted down by a USAF Fast Alert wing when they came in from Canada over Lake Ontario as a UFO. They were sequestered for a little while in a hangar while the Lt. Col. in charge yells at his air crews, “Stop playing with those damn geese!” Our daughter and I were utterly charmed by the movie.

Spud says:
September 24, 2010 at 11:47 am

A big problem with burn piles is that some joker decides to put some garbage in and next thing you know you have the stench of burning plastic. Ah well, a small price to pay for setting fires. Fire, heh heh . . . fire!

Uh oh, looks like another web page in Lileksdom: MR. CoRS – My Remarkable Collection of Room Sprays. We're given a picture of the label (with any good hints distorted) and then we have to determine what the scent is. If only we had smell-o-net enabled monitors ...

swschrad says:
September 24, 2010 at 12:01 pm

things are mildly interesting to look DOWN at low stratus clouds from somewhere past the 40th floor. one of the DJ-assist radio stations in new orleans when I was there was on the 45th floor of a tower near the superdome.

occasionally I would have reason to go up there and talk to one of our news customers. they did their traffic reports out the window, as they had full wrap-around windows like an air traffic control tower.

and when the drizzle and fog were hanging in, you could look out and see the same soothing grey or white cotton batt you see out the airplane windows. and the steady stream of near-parked cars on the Huey Long bridge descending into that soup brought to mind dire and dreadful movie plots.

here in da minneapple, looking down on a cloud that falls five stories below you is like looking on the city sleeping under a
blanket.

Bill McNutt says:
September 24, 2010 at 12:17 pm

Anna -
I thought he'd head to Arizona, too, but then realized: Lileks is a plainsman to the BONE. He can no more leave the plains that I can move up among the yankees.

Bill “Southerner” McNutt

swschrad says:
September 24, 2010 at 12:28 pm

@Bleatplus, storybook gardens: *After excretion, the matter changes, but philosophers are still working on that one.*

we Bleaters have that figured out, son. Laxatives. those poor philosophers.

to quote that great arbiter of society, the NatLamp “White House Tapes” album: “Here are the President's movements for the week. Monday, nothing. Tuesday, nothing. Wednesday, good one, some blood."

Sydney Brillo Duodenum says:
September 24, 2010 at 12:39 pm

Gah! Another week sluices through like one too many Taco Bell Chalupa Supreme's consumed after they have sat in the noon sun too long and still there is no Out of Context Ad Challenge. Did someone leave a microfiche in viewer and lose their access privileges?

Hunkybobtx says:
September 24, 2010 at 12:54 pm

the storybook land entries in bleatplus are hilarious. I looked at googlemaps for what is on the site in Wisconsin Dells. Looks like something called “Extreme World”. How things have changed. Their website is not informative, apart from the hours: Http:/www.extremeworld.com

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 24, 2010 at 1:08 pm

Something I noticed about Humpty Dumpty in the two parks as well as other illustrations is whether the pointy side of the egg body is up or down.

Kind of Lilliputian isn't it?

hpoulter says:
September 24, 2010 at 1:20 pm

The “Story Book Land” park was in my neck of the woods, and I know I went there, because we have slides to prove it, but I don’t remember it. The row of little buildings near the entrance to the park stayed in existence, though falling down and covered with vines, well into the 80s and could be seen from Route 1. We had a lot
of amusement parks in the DC area. Marshall Hall and Glen Echo, Frontier City…Now it's just King's Dominion, I guess.

A swift observation, bgbear.

GardenStater says:
September 24, 2010 at 1:33 pm

@swschrad: “a little oak and maple in the firepit...”

Nothing better than a fire in the fireplace (or pit) on a cool Autumn evening. But I fear that the enviros will end up banning that sort of thing before long.

Kevin says:
September 24, 2010 at 2:48 pm

More casual brilliance from our host:
“After a few days I am gum on the heel of a beast who didn’t even hear my bones crack when it stepped on me.”

and:
“My wife made something for her Bunco party that was seemingly made mostly of onions and garlic, and the smell hung like the ghost of someone murdered with great violence.”

To my mind, he and Wodehouse are the masters when it comes to brilliant similes.

Elizajane says:
September 24, 2010 at 3:19 pm

Well now I'm going to have to go home and have an illegal mini bonfire of leaves just so I can get a good whiff.

steveH says:
September 24, 2010 at 6:37 pm

Growing up in southern California, we had a concrete incinerator in the back yard of the East L.A. house built just after WW2, but the one in Whittier, built in early ’56 didn’t.

Which I missed, and explaining that the law had been changed to make their use illegal didn’t impress a six year old all that much. The highlight of the week having been the Burning of the Trash.

I suppose it should have, as my father was one of the first employees (industrial/refinery inspector) for the new Air Pollution Control District in L.A. county.

I guess it worked, the air quality now is hugely better than it was back then, although improvement was continuous, pretty much, from around 1967 or so to the present. Which is not to say that the L.A. Basin will ever have clear skies for most of the year; it certainly didn't before the Spanish arrived.

Joe Sixpack says:
September 24, 2010 at 6:55 pm

When our house smells like onions and garlic, we like it like that. That's homey, not antiseptic.
swschrad says:
September 24, 2010 at 7:54 pm

if you get tired of the onion/garlic taste of the air, AtmosKlear kicks its butt.

orangemtl says:
September 24, 2010 at 10:03 pm

What a lovely description of autumn. As a recent Midwest expat (in fact, I DID go to AZ, and my own Natalie IS in junior high: what’re the odds?), it’s a poignant reminder of the seasonal change that one never sees in this idyllic but somehow repetitive climate. Well written, and well shared. Thanks.
Sunday we went out for brunch with some folks, daughter included; she was feeling a bit abashed as the only kid, resigned to stare at her plate and think kid thoughts in then Prison of Silence. When we got to the restaurant it was a gorgeous bright autumn day, and we decided to sit outside; odd no one else was. When we were seated a bee came over to welcome us. It did not have menus. We waved it away, but it didn't like this and brought over a pal to let us know it had dibs. Well, brush them away. The waitress came by, took our orders, and left, after which we sat around waving around more bees. The waitress returned with some plates of lemon and sugar – a bee trap! A nice idea, and I'm sure it has worked before, but this was a bit like putting a little blood in the water a few yards away to make the shark move. It may move away for a moment, but you're also going to get more sharks.

But we waved them away, and probably looked like a monthly meeting of the Club of Airy Dismissers, people who sit around and make vague gestures describing something's relative unimportance. Daughter, however, was petrified. I kept telling her the bees were more interested in the juice and the caramel rolls, and if they wanted to sting, heck, they would have done it already! Eventually she went inside with my wife, and I stayed outside dismissing, chatting, eating, and at one point I brushed something ticking my chin OW DAMN
Now. Am I allergic? Don’t recall. Probably not. But we’ll sure find out, won’t we? At least I had the pleasure of knowing the little bastard was dead, and my jaw wasn’t entirely numb, so we stayed out chatting and eating until it became apparent we were a few minutes away from being encased entirely in bees, and then borne up into the air with some difficulty and flown off to a hive. So we went inside.

Good food, though.

Then we went to look at some houses. It’s the Parade of Homes, if you can describe driving all over hell and back to look at large, stationary objects. If they all floated past down the street with the occasional elephant, that would be different. But no. You go somewhere, take off your shoes, wander around and think “relative to these people, I have failed.” All the things one would like in life – incredible views, big living rooms with comfortable appointments, perfect offices, tubs built for a sumo wrestler – here they are, and this is as close as you’ll get, pal. Luckily, the first house wasn’t something I’d like at all – too horsey. Literally designed to give you that born-in-a-barn feel. If you lived there it would take about a month before you’d want nothing but oats for supper, and your spouse would come up to you and nuzzle your arm and you’d say “oh, I think I have a lump of sugar somewhere here.” The second place was nicer, but for some reason they were playing “Rite of Spring” on the house-wide sound system, so by the time you got to the entertainment room you couldn’t help but think it would be a nice place for sacrificing the tribe’s chosen virgin to make the crops grow again, or the markets improve. The third place was a large house shoehorned into a small lot, a million and change, a Pottery Barn catalog come to life. It was described as being “Steps from the lake,” which is true, but steps plural is a concept that extends into the infinite. I mean, it’s steps from the Vatican, too.

So that was Sunday. Saturday I had some errands to do, and had to get some stuff for a job, which meant going to the antique store, believe it or not. They had all sorts of new old stuff I’d never seen before. Drink up that warm lemonade, boys, happy days are here again:
Charlie Chaplin is not happy and you can understand why: he's been skinned.

Betsy Draper poses for an ad:

This was a find: three large posters that were unmistakably mid-century Disney:
Posters promoting “How to Catch a Cold,” a cartoon made in conjunction with Kleenex. As you might imagine, tissues were liberally employed as a preventative measure.

Finally: nothing says “stomachic calmer” like potions named after ancient kings and gods. Or 70s fake psychics and Star Trek characters:
Saturday night I was not in a mood to work on anything until about 11:30 PM, and then I got all sort of ideas. Designed two new sites I really liked, started the redesign of an old one, and started the redesign of the main page. (Yes. Again.) Then I went to bed with reluctance, because I really wanted to stay up until dawn working, but my head kept falling forward and hitting the keys, which probably meant it was already 2 and I should stop. So I did. But there are updates, of course – Flotsam has them, as usual, so you might want to bookmark that in case I neglect to post updates here. Not today, though – you’ll find the Matchbook Museum, such as it is, and you’ll find LA Dining 62 as well. Permatan!

Now, if you’ll excuse me – late assignment for a magazine story, of all things. Tumblr is loaded up; see you at all the usual places, and have a grand day.
44 RESPONSES TO ow (now updated with italics fixed.)

Poagao says:
September 27, 2010 at 3:22 am

The characters in the “Young China” ad are ????? with “qingnian”(?) meaning “Youth” and “Zhongguo” (??) meaning “China”.

Poagao says:
September 27, 2010 at 3:22 am

Oops, I guess your website doesn’t suppose Chinese characters.

GardenStater says:
September 27, 2010 at 5:08 am

I guess the Italics key got stuck again, huh?

Dr. Spyn says:
September 27, 2010 at 5:55 am

The “newest and smartest” restaurant on the matchbook: no one with an IQ below 150 and an SAT math score below 800 admitted.

Tom Beiter says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:10 am

I believe you left an italics font open somewhere after the word “Damn”.

Cory says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:14 am

That stomach powder just might have been named after the Akkadian king, if it was the original. After all, at one time he was the most powerful man in the world. Could probably deal with a little stomach upset.

greg zywicki says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:15 am

Since you’re Mr. AR Detail Man, you’ll probably appreciate this, my own bug-aboo: They’re YELLOW-JACKETS! Bees to Yellow-jackets is Coffee to Jubal, comparison wise. Yellow-jackets are probably more responsible for bad PR than anything else.

Jim T says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:21 am

Considering that until recently, anyone with a pulse could get a jumbo no-doc no-cash mortgage, perhaps better to think “relative to these people, I am debt free”!
Brerarnold says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:34 am

Suggestion: “Patagonia.” The Vatican involves some strokes as well as steps.

boblipton says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:38 am

Were these houses offered for sale because their ‘owners’ were underwater in negative-amortization, no money down Adjustable Rate Mortgages?

Bob

Mxymaster says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:45 am

One of the models in the last page of 1962 L.A., Frances Gregoli, apparently had a brief acting career and died too young:

http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0828933/

No info readily available on the interestingly named Baby Doll Leslie.

As for the Karnak Stomachic Tonic, I’m disappointed that it did not come in a mayonnaise jar (as found on Funk & Wagnall’s porch).

erp says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:48 am

You probably were attacked by yellow jackets, a type of wasp that are particularly vicious at the end of their life cycle in late summer.

Cambias says:
September 27, 2010 at 7:54 am

Note the fine print on the KARNAK label: 18% alcohol by volume. That's not a patent medicine, it's a cocktail.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 27, 2010 at 8:26 am

Discovered late in life that apparently I am allergic to bee stings too. Stepped on at least two a month playing in the back yard as a kid. Then as My Child Bride were rafting a short section of the American River near our house, at Salmon Falls where the river enters Folsom Lake, I placed my arm over the side of the raft as we were preparing to egress. Of course, a bee was waiting there for me. I took off my wedding band, but by the time we got home 20 minutes later, my left arm looked like Popeye's.

So now I have a bee sting kit. You’re supposed to stick the needle in a muscle and inject, but really, I’m waiting for Dr. McCoy's Hypospray.

DON’T SAY ‘I don’t care for Mexican food’.

Indeed, don’t say it – blasphemer. You’re either with us, or against us. And if you care not for Mexican food, you’re decidedly against
us.

**Brisko** says:
September 27, 2010 at 8:40 am

The italics makes everything look like it is either of great importance, or said sarcastically. You be the judge!

**rbj** says:
September 27, 2010 at 8:54 am

Here:

Free of charge.

Sunday, after dogs to the park & drive afterwards, and then a round of errands, I got to lay on the couch with said hounds and watch football through my eyelids with the sound off. Given that I get Lions games, that's perhaps the best way to watch. Saves up energy to watch Mad Men.

**Michael Rittenhouse** says:
September 27, 2010 at 8:56 am

Every young couple's house begins in the Pottery Barn lifestyle.

After the third kid arrives, it's Poverty Barn.

**rbj** says:
September 27, 2010 at 8:59 am

Hm, end italics code doesn't show up in the comments.

**GardenStater** says:
September 27, 2010 at 9:00 am

@Greg: “Since you're Mr. AR Detail Man, you'll probably appreciate this, my own bug-aboo:They're YELLOW-JACKETS! Bees to Yellow-jackets is Coffee to Jubal, comparison wise. Yellow-jackets are probably more responsible for bad PR than anything else.”

Very true. As the husband of an amateur beekeeper, I'm often placed in the position of defending the friendly and useful honeybee.

**wiredog** says:
September 27, 2010 at 9:57 am

Voice of the Hive:
http://voiceofthehive.com/

When wasps attack:
http://voiceofthehive.com/VotH/4_Voice_of_the_Hive-Lions_at_the_Gate.htm

**Will** says:
September 27, 2010 at 9:59 am

Yellowjackets are mean and stupid — kind of like Moe Howard. The spider by my front porch has been feasting on the little blighters, for
which I thank her.

Brisko says:
September 27, 2010 at 10:03 am
@GardenStater
Jubal the character from the Book of Genesis?
I've never heard of a drink called Jubal.

Tom says:
September 27, 2010 at 10:03 am
I've always called them jellow yackets* after I heard a friend's Swedish mother yell it out when one flew into their kitchen one summer.

Her English was perfect except when flustered by those evil yackets.

*for the full effect pronounce the ‘j’ with a slightly hard ‘ch’ sound, and add Swedish Chef effects for bonus points.

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 27, 2010 at 10:12 am
@Tom, bork, bork, bork!

swschrad says:
September 27, 2010 at 10:33 am
@Boblipton: the owners, MegaCrustyBank LLC, would be pleased if you joined the six previous tenants in a ten-minute 200% ARM finance package.

@bee-allergy sufferers: I have been assured by a doctor of actual degree in the medical field that if you have an asthmatic nearby, 4-6 puffs on a rescue inhaler has about the same medical effect as an EpiPen.

so always invite a wheezer to your finer dining experiences.

I'm free most night this week.

grs says:
September 27, 2010 at 10:34 am
“I've never heard of a drink called Jubal.”

Head on down to the Diner. They've got a supply.

Cory says:
September 27, 2010 at 11:02 am
Mxymaster:
Great post.

The Dread Pirate Neck Beard says:
September 27, 2010 at 11:06 am
Gah! please!
JamesS says:
September 27, 2010 at 11:19 am

Here, lemme see if I can fix this...

Did that work?

Yellow jackets are hornets, not bees, which explains their foul temper. Years ago, while enjoying some tasty, frosty beers on the front porch, my wife and I were disturbed by the reptiles. We poured a little on the banister and armed ourselves with a flyswatter. A couple of hours later there was a pile of dead hornets, but we were unbothered. The beer was too much of an attraction compared to us.

JamesS says:
September 27, 2010 at 11:20 am

Goodness, how many open italics tags are there?

Anything?

Charlie Young says:
September 27, 2010 at 11:30 am

It's Bleatalics Day. I guess it's better than having it in all caps.

swschrad says:
September 27, 2010 at 12:15 pm

@Charlie Young: it only takes one open tag if that one has admin powers.

if it was all caps, it would be Salute To The TeleType ™ day.

swschrad says:
September 27, 2010 at 1:19 pm

yellow jackets: an old hunting camp trick is to take a bowl of sugar, and pour a bunch of vodka on it. the critters come for lunch, and stay long past happy hour, on their backs.

backyard trick is a no-return bottle of Hawaiian Punch. drink off 2/3 and leave the bottle around, preferably with a signal ribbon (help! italics attack!) around the bottle so nobody with brains picks it up. the buggers will fly in happily to guzzle, and, surprise! — they can't fly back out again.

yellow jackets in fall are carrion beasts, what they really crave is meat protein. they'll settle for anything sweet or perfumed. so sic 'em on Aunt Tillie, over there in the corner.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 27, 2010 at 2:46 pm

We had a yellow jacket invasion back in the 60s, they were quite fashionable around these parts and were more popular than a Nehru.
Emmett Flatus says:
September 27, 2010 at 3:08 pm

When The Bleat loads why does it always assume I want to first revisit the picture of the old building?

DryOwlTacos says:
September 27, 2010 at 3:15 pm

I note that Sargon is encased in a globe on the package.

fizzbin says:
September 27, 2010 at 4:43 pm

@swschrad …poo upon yellow jackets-if yer pourin' vodka, I'll be there.

“…stay long past happy hour, on their backs”. Are you monitoring my living room? 😞

Philip Scott Thomas says:
September 27, 2010 at 5:07 pm

So if bees give us honey, do wasps give us English mustard?

swschrad says:
September 27, 2010 at 5:52 pm

@Emmett: you are using the laugh machine of the ages, Internet Explorer. it can't handle such newfangled modern things as “style sheets” and “graphics” and “flow.” thus, it locks onto Street View stuff and goes batshirt insane.

there are those using beta 9.0 who say it fixes everything.

but few will be able to use IE9.0, because it's only for Windows 7. no side ports, no retrofits. it's Safari-share.

those of us who are working for companies with hidebound IT operations that only support junk like IE 7 are right displeased every time a Street View is linked.

not that I have a cow about it, or anything.

wawona says:
September 27, 2010 at 10:44 pm

…I like the local name my nephews use for what I grew up calling yellowjackets: “meat bees”. Now we always call them that. And they ARE mean this time of year!

Doc says:
September 27, 2010 at 11:30 pm

Eating at El Cholo is a must if you visit L.A., particularly during green corn tamale season. It's proper Mexican food – Angeleno style.

Will says:
September 28, 2010 at 9:55 am
“but few will be able to use IE9.0, because it's only for Windows 7. no side ports, no retrofits. it's Safari-share.”
Actually, it works on Vista SP2 as well. And why MicroSoft should spend time developing software to work on an OS that's three generations old is beyond me. XP has had its day, it's time to move on.

Emmett Flatus says:
September 28, 2010 at 11:15 am

“not that I have a cow about it, or anything.”

Wasn't aware that posing a question was equivalent to bovine birthing. Sorry.

Normie says:
September 28, 2010 at 1:57 pm

@ JamesS – “Reptiles” were disturbing you? I thought you were talking about yellow jackets.
Who cares? You're reading this? Really?
A warm night after a warm day. This is fall as it's supposed to be, except for the large grade-A jumbo egg on my chin. Turns out I am slightly allergic to bee stings, because this one just got large and slightly numb. Well, nothing to do but wait for it to go down, and hope my family stops looking at me and suppressing their laughter. Really. My wife has the sympathetic expression you would want, but it's mixed with a form of scientific curiosity I can do without.

Part of the problem may have been sleeping with my chin on my forearm, which seemed to move the venom around. Also, the stinger didn't come out. Also, a goddamned bee bit me.

I apologize for the language, but I look like those kids in the old comic books who had a toothache, with a big bulge and jagged lines coming out of their heads to indicate pain. I should be wearing one of those jaw-diapers with a knot on the top.

Other than that, Monday at its finest; I like Mondays. The only day of the week I don't like is Wednesday, because everything piles up into one large bolus the size of a swollen bee-sting. I finished my work, drove home to be home when daughter gets home, after which it's homework for her and more work for me. Today, however, Jasper heard me go outside to sit on the steps, and insisted he come out and wait. Basic dog assumption: wherever you are must be more interesting than wherever they are. So he sat in the sun and...
looked handsome.

It's a lovely time of year at Jasperwood. They're all lovely. Doesn't make me wish I lived in one of those Dream Houses at all. Although I wonder what I would do if I won the lottery. First of all, I'd be surprised, because I don't play the lottery. But once I had a dream that I would build this house elsewhere, with modifications – say, build every room 25% larger. Which would be just weird at first, when you think about it: so, we shrunk? But I just love the floorplan here. There's nothing special about it, but it's unique, and I'm used to it, and there are clear psychological demarcations between the rooms. I don't like the places with flabby spaces that bleed into each other, dammit; give me a room for this and a room for that, thank you. But I would also like an enormous screening room and a workout room and a pool. Also a bowling alley.

My wife said, correctly, that are lucky to be here for many reasons, partly because we are close to everything. WHAT? I said. I CAN'T HEAR YOU THERE'S A PLANE OVERHEAD. But she's right; we're close. But if I had my druthers I would live and work in a place that's somewhat isolated, and so
completely appointed I wouldn’t need to go out. I have no idea how long it would take before I craved to be somewhere more populated, but if I won the lottery I'd also buy a condo downtown, so there’s that.

Not on the list? Cars. I love old cars, but I would not go full Leno and have a barn full of cars. I’d be more likely to build a wing of the house with 30 pinball machines. Not really that much into transportation machinery – okay, okay, a helicopter, for those days when you feel like Hunting Man, and want to take the chopper up over the compound and plink away at the six or ten desperate criminals you have roaming the ground behind the electrified fence. Paintball, of course. And they'd be employees. There's the whole 1099 thing to worry about at the end of the year, but you have people for that.

I know what you’re thinking: the chopper pilot lives on the grounds, waiting for your beck and / or call? No, I think that’s a bit much. I mean, he could, but that’s an extravagance. So you’d have to pencil in those sessions, which would mean you couldn’t just head up to blow off some steam. Takes all the spontaneous pleasure out of it, but you can’t have everything.

I had the most extraordinary thing happen tonight, aside from the monstrous swelling of my bite, which fills me with strange sensations of fear and power, as though I am becoming something both horrible and wonderful, with an interest in pollen and a shared collective unconsciousness rooted in the very essence of my DNA – I HEAR you, my Queen, I HEAR YOU

Sorry; distracted. I was tweaking the interface for a site, which of course led to the inevitable tweaking of the six subsites contained therein. One of them had to do with photos my Grandma took as a young girl. I've scanned more in the years since I put up the site, and have been meaning to do something about it. So. I redesigned it, then figured I should include a photo of her camera, which I have –

... and therein hangs a tale, too. I got the camera from my mother. I'd heard my cousin wanted to see the ancient Brownie, since he was a camera buff. Last October I found myself in a tiny church on the plains for my mother's brother's funeral at the church where my Grandma had her funeral. Her plot's out back. I visited them all before I went inside for the latest installment. My cousin was playing the piano for the service, and afterwards we talked. We always got along. I always admired him. I mentioned the camera, and he said sure, whatever, whenever. Afterwards I got in my car and drove away and I wouldn’t see him again, ever; he died in a car crash a few months later.

So I'm redoing the site, and I wonder if the camera is still in the Closet. It is. I take it out. I realize I never opened it up. I push this silver knob, pull that – nothing. I go on the internet, google the model number, and up pops an fargin’ instructional manual for the device. It's a Brownie.
Scroll down . . . down . . . ah. “Depress the concealed button (Fig. 1)” I had no idea, it being concealed. Click- thunk – the front of the camera pops open, for the first time in decades. I read on, find out how to frame a picture through the viewfinder. I point it at the computer that has the picture of a photo she took 85 years ago . . . and press the shutter.

It still works. Or would, if it had film. The sound of that shutter was the best thing that happened today, really. When Grandma was a young woman she would have never imagined someone figuring out how to open her camera in the early years of the 21st century, and think of her, and what she saw through the viewfinder. Tomorrow I’ll put the camera in my daughter’s hands and show her the pictures, and I’ll probably get a “cool,” and that may be that, but what more can you hope for? If I knew someone would put my iPad in the hands of a great-grandchild, turn it on, and flick through photos I took on a trip, well, that would be enough. We hope to be remembered and we know we will be forgotten. All you can do is face the dusk and throw the ball as hard and far as you can.

On that note: some new North Dakota small towns on google; go here. For some reason on preview they’re all showing up blurry, but that may be a problem on my end. There’s also Comic Sins, HERE. Of course these things
can be found at Flotsam, as well.

See you around in the usual places, folks. Have a grand day! By which I mean: BEE-FREE.

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Pass it along, if you wish

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70 RESPONSES TO grandma's camera

Wagner von Drupen-Sachs says:
September 28, 2010 at 1:20 pm

bgbear:
“Was you ever bit by a dead bee?”

No, was you?

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 28, 2010 at 1:27 pm

Yeah. You know, you gotta be careful of dead bees. They can sting ya just as bad as live ones, especially if they was kinda mad when they got killed.

Karla says:
September 28, 2010 at 1:31 pm

Google streetview still blurry. 😦
My Grandfather grew up in Bowbells. Worked as a farmhand from a very young age. He probably never saw the inside of that bank.

Kerry Potenza says:
September 28, 2010 at 1:46 pm

Elizajane says:
Why is every one saying “bit by a bee”? When was “stung” replaced by “bit” in the bee lexicon? Was I behind the door again?

@Elizajane: I don’t think honeybees bite, but yellowjackets sure do! My mother swallowed one once (see above post) and it BIT her quite a lot – she said it was worse pain than childbirth! And this is the mother of seven!

Ben says:
September 28, 2010 at 1:56 pm

Is it possible for a month-old sting to suddenly flare up just by thinking about it? About a month ago, I got attacked by a wasp when I invaded its nest my garden shed in search of a rake. Got me on the knuckle of my thumb, and it swelled up to the point that I couldn’t bend my thumb at all. Hurt for days, itched for over a week. Now suddenly I have an unexplained soreness on that thumb. I don’t remember banging it on anything in the past 24 hours, so I’m wondering if all this bee talk is causing my mind to revisit the sting.

As a kid, I got stung a lot. They hurt, but didn’t last long and then I
was fine. We had an old apple tree in the back yard, which meant bees everywhere from spring to fall, and I managed to get stung about once a year until I got old enough to learn to avoid them. The last time I got stung, I stepped on a wasps' nest in the woods and got 2 jabs in the leg about an inch apart, swelled up pretty bad but didn't have any lasting effects. That was over 16 years ago, and apparently my reactions to wasp stings got a lot worse over that time. Or maybe this one was just a nasty sunofabee. Whatever the case may be, I'm a lot more careful when approaching that shed now. Usually with a bug-bomb in hand.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 28, 2010 at 1:56 pm

@Kerry P. The lines I, and a couple of others, am throwing around, are from 1944's To Have And Have Not so, at least alcoholic fishing boat crew were using “bit” over 60 years ago.

Not exactly an Avant-garde group so I think you are still hip.

O death, where is thy sting?

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 28, 2010 at 2:02 pm

oh and as far as “what bit/stung me” my recollection is the bee stings do indeed sting, they are a sharp feeling where as wasp (yellow jacket) bites have a dull ache like someone hit you with a small hammer.

anyone else feel the same way?

browniejr says:
September 28, 2010 at 2:32 pm

bgbear: Nice Walter Brennan reference…
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSgqrrWyF0Y

MJBirch says:
September 28, 2010 at 3:06 pm

Lottery game: I'd pay everything off, travel for a year, then move to a good college town, buy a house and take random classes for the rest of my life. Whatever catches my attention.

Colleen says:
September 28, 2010 at 3:09 pm

What no pic of the beesting? After gentle washing with soap and water and sanitizing I used peroxide, you can put ice on it (to minimize the allergic reaction), and take an anti-inflamatory. My husband and both got I got stung after walking on a ground nest. I hadn't been stung in so long I had to call the insurance nursing line cuz I didn't know what to do. This is the advice she gave us. Hope you feel better soon!

Yael says:
September 28, 2010 at 3:17 pm
The pictures in the NoDak site appear blurry from the reader's side, as well. And none of the regular Street View interactive tidbits (zoom, move around). Just a blurry photo.

I have actually noticed that while working on my own blog (sorry for that kinda-plug, although I have to admit that your work here and in your other sites is somewhat of an influence/inspiration) – not just in previews, but also in posts that have already been published, and where it worked fine before. So I'm thinking the problem is probably on the Google side of things. Hope they fix it soon.

**GardenStater** says:
September 28, 2010 at 3:36 pm

@bgbear: “anyone else feel the same way?”

I agree. Two years ago, we had a tree blow over in the backyard during a windstorm. It came to rest on top of my wife's beehive. Didn’t do any damage, just knocked the top cover askew.

I took a chainsaw to the tree, then thought “Well, I think I’ll fix the cover on that hive.”

Big mistake—suddenly a couple dozen honeybees were after the giant who was attempting to invade. I got stung a half-dozen times, on my hands, arms, and forehead. (Of course I wasn’t wearing any protection—I’m a man!)

Hurt like a SOB, and itched for days. But not the same hammer-blow you describe from yellowjackets.

**Pieter** says:
September 28, 2010 at 4:00 pm

James

I have the film for your camera or at least part of a roll. Recently went through an old box of childhood ‘stuff’ that you would love. Tenth anniversary Disneyland momentoes, Peter Paul and Mary signed program from the Greek Theater, the usual. Lo and behold, I find my old childhood Brownie. Looked in the little red window that tracked what shot you were on and saw a 6. Five shots taken, 7 left. Rewound the film and took it out. What’s on those 5 from fifty years ago? Mom, dad, my dog ‘Lady’, this twelve year old in a sixty-two year old body wants to know. Anyone out there know how to get old Kodacolor film developed?

**bgbear (roger h)** says:
September 28, 2010 at 4:25 pm

Have a Brownie Hawkeye circa late 50s and I looked into it once, 127 film IIIC, and there are suppliers on web and you can mail for processing.

Also, I recall that if you have an old roll it helps because they can use the old film roll cartridge to re-load new film.

**bgbear (roger h)** says:
September 28, 2010 at 4:27 pm

Oops, lileks/pieter's cameras are probably older and use different (117?) film.
again, I think an old cartridge helps.

swschrard says:
September 28, 2010 at 5:11 pm

creaky old film loses its image. over time, the tagged ions among the halide (usually silver nitrate in film, either silver nitrate or silver chloride in print paper) revert to inactive state. within 3-5 years, it's pretty much not going to be a recoverable image.

which doesn't mean you shouldn't try.

the major difference in variations of Kodacolor negative film is the dye chemistry. I've been able to move back and forth between slide and negative material/chemistry, including between E4 and C41, although the color palette can require some most unusual filter packs in printing.

take it to a place where they still hand process or have a machine that can handle 120/620 width film, and just tell 'em to run it, because I have (flip flip flip) several Presidents who want to see what happens.

hey, worst that can happen is it's a blank roll. I ran into one, and a roll of ghosts, down in the basement that had to be 20 years old.

Kev says:
September 28, 2010 at 11:01 pm

Check this out:
http://www.mcnerneyisland.com/

A magical place, and my visit there was once of the happiest days of my life! Charming owner. Interesting guy, Jim McNerney. And he's from NJ!

Thanks for posting that Kerry, as it was quite intriguing to me; not only is that my family name, but the owner shares a name with one of my uncles. I'm definitely sending this link to some family members.

shinumo says:
September 28, 2010 at 11:45 pm

Lottery Fantasy:

Lots and lots of naughty words


steveH says:
September 29, 2010 at 6:52 pm

Rollfilm cameras…

The first camera I ever handled was my grandmother's Kodak Brownie Target Six-20. Which used 620 rollfilm, invented by Kodak for that camera line in the early 1930s. Which film nobody makes any more.

Thing is, 620 film is the same as 120 (which is still made, mostly used by professionals and slightly-mad amateurs), just on slightly smaller reels. So, if you've got a 620 camera, you can get some 120
film, unroll it from the 120 reels onto the 620 reels. In the dark. And vice versa (in the dark) before you send it off for processing, if you don't develop your own film.

220 film is the same as 120, but twice as long, although the paper backing is in two parts, one at each end of the film.

All of them, 120/220/620 are/were 60mm wide. Pretty successful, what with 120 being introduced in 1901.

126 film was a cartridge format for the Kodak Instamatic cameras, starting in the early '60s, and 110 was its minime.

127 was a rollfilm format, 46mm wide, produced from around 1913 until about 1995 (except by Efke). Killed by 126 and 110.

135 is plain old 35mm film.

Kodak drove the photo industry for a long time; it remains to be seen whether or not they'll survive long in the digital age.

Heck, who knows how long film will hang on in the digital age? But it's not dead yet.

Soozcat says:
October 2, 2010 at 1:41 am

For what it's worth, I never play the lottery and yet I won $1 (yes, a whole freaking dollar) in the New York State Lottery.

While working at WordPerfect back in the day, I did a small good deed for a man living on Staten Island, and as a gesture of thanks he sent me a NYSL scratch ticket. Turned out to be good for $1. Just for kicks, I sent in the ticket and received a check good for the promised dollar. I never actually cashed it; the thing remained pinned to my office bulletin board for as long as I worked there.
WHY A STORK?
A lost cultural reference, alas. Plus: Listen! […]

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

© 2011 The Bleat.
I have to start with this, because it just says everything about something. It’s a device for cutting through those annoying thick plastic packages. What, as they say, is wrong with this picture?
The joys of gadgets: just installed something called “Zumo,” which is -

Well, can’t you tell from the name?

Of course not. You can’t tell anything from any name these days. A program called “Wombat” may be something that helps you identify the contents of your spice cabinet with a barcode reader, or a program that helps you keep track of how much time you have left on your candles by using a proprietary formula that analyzes a picture of the candle, compares it against a database, and estimates the time left until the candle goes out. It’s free, but if you upgrade to premium it will send you alerts when the candle is out! Never find yourself in the darkness again!

Zumo – the gold-master version of the beta program, ShakaZumo – syncs your iPad or iPhone to your main computer’s media library. I’ve tried a few of these, but the set-up was cumbersome, or the icon was ugly. This was painless, and within minutes, as the ads say, I was streaming to my iPad! Wow! Cool! Then I put my iPad down because I didn’t want to watch anything at the moment. Apparently it works anywhere, which means if I ever find
myself in a coffee shop and have a desperate desire to watch TV, I’m set. But it also streams your music, so now I don’t have to load what I want to hear on my iPad, which currently has zero (0) pieces of music. Probably won’t work at the office, where they have some ridiculous policy about not letting people clog the network with huge amounts of data.

Well, FINE, be that way; that’s why God invented Steve Jobs, who invented the iPod. I confess to being an old-school iPod user; I like the classic for its heft, and its capacity. Now that I am winnowing down my musical collection to the bones, it’s actually useful again, instead of being a noisy millstone that reminds me how much crap and cruft I’ve collected over the years. There was a time, yea, there was a time, when I thought it would be handy to have instant access to the collected works of Yma Sumac, but eventually I realized I don’t want to hear anything she did, ever. But I’ve mentioned this before. I did not, however, tell you the tale of the missing iPod.

I had a Nano. A fat one. It replaced the green skinny one, which I loved because it matched my car, and life is all about customization to establish a narrow, meaningless set of criteria that provide a superficial distinction between you and someone else. But its battery lost its will to live around the time new models came out. The new models, however, did not come in Car Green. So I fought the future. I held out. Then the classic iPod grew weary of life, and its battery expired. Oh, sure, I could rail against the transitory nature of our shiny devices, buy a new battery, but ooooh, look at the new models! Suddenly they looked attractive, and they had video. So for a year I would take planes watching Perry Mason on a screen the size of my thumbnail. Eventually I went back to a new Classic, so I could take planes and watch Perry Mason on the screen the size of three thumbnails, and I was feeling purty slick, boss. Purty dang slick.

So the old Nano was repositioned for Old Radio Shows, and nothing else. I kept it in the car so I always had hours of entertainment. Mind you, the satellite radio channel plays old radio shows, but you might come in the middle of one, or it could be stupid. And if you like it, but you get home before it’s done, you’re screwed, brother: the XM radio apps do not carry the old radio channel, for reasons I cannot possibly imagine. Not like there’s copyright issues. But you can run upstairs and check archive.org and find the episode, if you’re lucky, plowing through long lists of episode titles – if the page has any – to see if they describe what you were listening to. OR you can hook up an XM radio receiver to your tuner, and listen there, but A) by the time you find the channel you’ve missed five minutes, and B) you have to sit there, and C) I got rid of that a year ago because I was tired of paying five dollars a month.

Then I lost the old Nano. Since I had started to use it for entertainment during exercise, this was a problem. I used some Amazon credit to get a new one, pleased that it didn’t handle video. THANK YOU OH THANK YOU. No more transferring shows to the Nano through iTunes, only to discover that the format was wrong. That’s not a deal-killer; run it through some programs to convert it, then put it in iTunes . . . except now there’s a big file in iTunes
clogging up the hard drive, and abrading my sense of Order and Efficiency. I know! I know! Create a new user account on the computer, sync the Nano, load it up, then eliminate the user. Problem solved!

Where was I? New Nano. Hasn’t shown up yet. Taking a while for Amazon to meet the demand. But: it’s Car Green. So life is good.

Opened the drawer tonight to get the checkbook, and found the old Nano.

Hmm.

This means . . . I can use it for my daughter’s alarm clock, which I bought at a neighborhood silent auction for a pittance. It’s iPod enabled. But this means I will have to construct a custom alert. Why? Because I can. So. Get out the keyboard, ask her what she would like to have for her wakeup call, put together something . . . then sync it.

It’s synced to the account I deleted! Idiot. Wipe it, pair it, sync it. There! Done! Life is customized down to the atomic level.

Things were easier when stuff was just on, and then it was off, and it never came around again, except for summer repeats. Things were easier when radios were on, or off, and that was it. Things were easier. Not better, mind you; just easier. While I like having a multiplicity of sources to provide media, managing these streams is like putting necklaces on a thrashing hydra. And there’s no solution in sight – only product upon product, each controlling a particular sliver. The networks want you do to things their way. The cable companies have their own ideas. The internet-streaming versions have their own interfaces, and work with this, but not with that.

You know what’s easiest? Pirating everything and streaming it to your TV. That’s it. Problem solved. It’s wrong, of course. People don’t pirate because it’s easier, they pirate because they don’t want to pay. But if you’re adept at these things it’s much easier than the official way, which feels like jumping through hoops while carrying a concrete block with your pants full of electric eels.

Here’s the additional frustration: whether or not a show survives is now based on people who watch TV while it’s broadcast. “Lone Star” got cancelled after two eps, and while I’m not shedding any tears – who wants to watch a show about a grifter screwing over people and trying to please his father? I just don’t care – it was highly regarded by some, and might have been a good eight-ep series, perhaps renewed for another go-round. But not enough people were sitting on their sofa watching it while it was broadcast.

I don’t want my TV choices dictated by people who have nothing better to do than watch TV.

Anyway. End of that. Now to watch “The Event,” which I TiVod, thank heavens. I hope I don’t like it. If I like it they’ll kill it in three weeks.
New today: guess what this is about. Go HERE – and see you around in the usual places.

45 RESPONSES TO the media hydra

**Dave In Tucson** says:
September 29, 2010 at 1:09 am

Picture caption: “You sunk a PT boat? Shoot, son, that aint nothin’”.

Because the younger guy kinda looks like Cliff Robertson, and... oh, never mind.

**efurman** says:
September 29, 2010 at 1:11 am

What is the deal with you and icons?? Who cares what icons look like! 😊

And can’t you just change the icon?

**Kerry Potenza** says:
September 29, 2010 at 5:20 am

The irony of the Zip Snip packaging is priceless.

My husband's first job as a teenager was in the toy dept. of a KMart. Back in the late 70's, they didn't have the impenetrable packaging that today's toys are encased in. There were always ripped, tattered boxes. Lots of thievery. Made buying a nice, unmarred gift nearly impossible. What's better? Nowadays, I often rip my skin to shreds in an attempt at extracting my daughter's toys from their plastic prisons.
MikeH says:
September 29, 2010 at 5:30 am

Ah yes, toy packaging. It is good for display reasons, I agree. But good gawd you take it home and try to open up with a screaming kid wanting the toy….

hpoulter says:
September 29, 2010 at 5:59 am

What, no Yma Sumac ever? I love her on the Martin Denny “Exotica” Wimoweh song link, although I don't know how often I'd want to listen to it.

Whenever I see Clifton Webb, I think of Bob Newhart's short but very funny autobiography. He tells about being invited to his first real celebrity-filled A-list party, when his career was just starting to take off. He was taken aback when Clifton Webb asked him to dance.

Chas C-Q says:
September 29, 2010 at 6:26 am

“But it all feels like a backdrop to the Stanwyck story – maybe because it is.”

Something similar can be said about James Cameron's version.

Wagner von Drupen-Sachs says:
September 29, 2010 at 6:35 am

Thomas Meehan had a story in the New Yorker about a party he was hosting with Yma Sumac. Among the guests were Ava Gardner, Ida Lupin, Ona Munson, Oona O'Neill, Abba Eban, and Eva Gabor. His job was to introduce everybody to each other by their first name.

And then, as the saying goes, he woke up. And that's all I know about Yma Sumac.

Olive says:
September 29, 2010 at 6:50 am

“and life is all about customization to establish a narrow, meaningless set of criteria that provide a superficial distinction between you and someone else.” – Brilliant

Joe Sixpack says:
September 29, 2010 at 7:29 am

You must be one small person to be able to work the iPod Nano.

hpoulter says:
September 29, 2010 at 7:30 am

He forgot to invite Una Merkel?

Mxymaster says:
September 29, 2010 at 7:47 am

Bowman pointed out that the remake of the “War of the Worlds”
was all just a backdrop to the main story. World almost destroyed, but that's OK! Tom Cruise got his mojo back!

Of course, the same thing happened in “2012” for Cusack, but the world was destroyed. Hollywood screenwriters are now the moron kids who grew up in history classes that were all taught with the idea of coaxing interest into the kids by imagining themselves in this or that historical event, rather than explaining why the event itself is interesting. Because, like, the invasion of the Earth by Da Mahshuns* wouldn't be interesting on its own.

*Brooklyn Academy of Fine Art version.

**SWBart says:**
September 29, 2010 at 7:50 am

The best tool for those awful plastic packages is a tin snips. It cuts through that stuff like nothing.

**Cuneo says:**
September 29, 2010 at 8:01 am

“You sunk a PT boat? Shoot, son, that aint nothin’.”
No, Dave, I think the Captain said, “Are you the young rascal who performed an unauthorized flyby over my bridge?” because he looks like a young Tom Cruise who had a vertical leap of 72 inches and could spike a volleyball and, oh never mind.

**Crabtree says:**
September 29, 2010 at 8:34 am

Admiral Hardrade and Hymie the Robot on vacation.

**Tuffy the Tuna says:**
September 29, 2010 at 8:46 am

“Not like there's copyright issues.” Unfortunately, that recently changed for OTR downloads. I was able to burn CDs of every available Jack Benny program from the 1940 season through 1951 to make the the frequent commutes between here and Chicago a little less tedious. But as of August, no more Benny. No more Burns & Allen, Lum & Abner or Charlie McCarthy either. Someone approached the estates with a plan to squeeze out a bit more revenue from these old shows. A few collections are still available, e.g. Fred Allen (“Howdy, bub!”).

**Alan S. says:**
September 29, 2010 at 8:48 am

To add to your frustration about the ratings game:

House MD, which I still watch for some reason, was deliberately stretched to reach five minutes into the next hour in order to generate some sort of temporal inertia which would force me to watch the already canceled Lone Star. My ultra-modern TV won't switch channels, or sources, in less than ten seconds, so I couldn't do the blink-surf back and forth, so I didn't see the plane crash in the desert in The Event. Which, since I sort of like it and now has D.B. Sweeney in it, will automatically be canceled anyway (c.f. Strange Luck).
And they wonder why people pirate this stuff to watch on their own schedule.

**Mark** says:
September 29, 2010 at 9:09 am

Good God, you make life complicated.

**Bonnie** says:
September 29, 2010 at 9:11 am

I went to see the Titanic exhibit at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science with my son on a school field trip. We were given tickets that matched a Titanic passenger, and at the end of the exhibit was a list of the dead and the survivors, displayed with a giant block of carved ice that made the whole room feel like the Atlantic in winter.

My son did not survive and neither did I. We stood clutching our tickets and looking at our passenger names, as if we could change the result just by hoping. It was a brilliant way to stage an exhibit and I will never forget how I felt.

So after dying on the Titanic, we went to the Dinosaur exhibit and felt much better. Thank goodness for T. Rex.

**AnnaN** says:
September 29, 2010 at 9:13 am

“I don’t want my TV choices dictated by people who have nothing better to do than watch TV. ”

But is that really the case these days? Don’t most people use a DVR to record shows and watch them later? I know if you do this through TiVo or Comcast they've got the viewership data.

As for Lone Star, I believe the issue was that it lost a HUGE percentage of its lead-in audience and that effectively killed it.

**juanito - John Davey** says:
September 29, 2010 at 9:15 am

*Lileks*

*And morning breaks on a matte shot.*

Too many mornings break on a matte shot! Which would be much better if based on the original drawings of Ralph McQuarrie.

I'm down to a first generation iPod Nano and an iPod Touch. My Android phone holds more music, I can always increase it's storage and it's always with me. My 9 year old, upon seeing the new iPod Nano (with touch) was intrigued, until she discovered – no wireless: “Nevermind”.

Saw yesterday that there is an acute iPhone shortage in China. The Intellectual Property Rights infringing solution? A fitted case with a port replicator that turns an iPod Touch into an iPhone (no camera). The device runs about $79.00 in China, and they are looking to bring it to the United States. Find a need: Fill it.
Scott says:
September 29, 2010 at 9:38 am

Apple. It just works. *rolls eyes* Please.

shesnailie says:
September 29, 2010 at 9:42 am

_@_.v – the titanic set and ship model – minus a funnel – were reused for the marilyn monroe movie ‘gentlemen prefer blondes’…

swschrad says:
September 29, 2010 at 10:21 am

you know, it isn’t that hard to replace batteries in the iPod.

but be really careful pulling the control wheel plug off the circuit board. I killed three buttons and was only able to fix the traces on two of them.

MJBirch says:
September 29, 2010 at 10:31 am

it’s IN an annoying adult-proof plastic container, oh never mind — point made many times.

RebeccaH says:
September 29, 2010 at 10:32 am

Chinese plastic packaging is the enemy of my enemy, and of me too. The solution? Go to the source: I found a $.99 (on sale) pair of Chinese-made scissors in Michael’s Craft and Art Supply with blades as sharp as knives. I swear they’d cut through metal, because they make Chinese plastic packaging seem like soft cheese. Hah!

Mark E. Hurling says:
September 29, 2010 at 10:35 am

Funny how heavily packaged items should come up just now. Last weekend my Dearly Beloved requested my help in opening something triple heavy gauge wrapped. I got out my trusty tanto blade knife and cut away. The blade slipped and sliced my thumb. Happily not too deep. The plastic was so thick it took some real torque to cut it free and that was when isometric contraction suddenly overtook tensile polycarbonate strength and YOW! Scary for a moment but did not require stitches.

As for the Titanic clips, I’m surprised someone hasn’t already mentioned that the fatal ice burg as a low lying floe or a growler as His Majesty’s Jolly Jack Tars would refer to them.

JamesS says:
September 29, 2010 at 10:51 am

(With apologies to Alan Jay Lerner)

I'm an ordinary man
Who desires nothing more
Than just an ordinary chance
To live exactly as he likes
And do precisely what he wants.

An average man am I,
Of no eccentric whim,
Who likes to live his life, free of strife,
Doing whatever he thinks is best for him.
Oh, Just an ordinary man.

But! Let an iPod in your life,
And your serenity is through.
It'll reorganize your tunes
from old Beatles to new Muse,
Then go to the enthralling fun
Of overhauling you.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 29, 2010 at 11:08 am

I like this opener:

http://www.enjoyzibra.com/Home/PM/home.html

Had same question when I had to open its package. I like the offset snipper blades that keep your hand away from the jagged packaging as it cuts.

wiredog says:
September 29, 2010 at 11:22 am

Ahem. WOMBAT…

The iPod Nano (old one) is a perfect size to velcro next to the radio on the Element. That way you don't have to try holding it and operating it at the same time, and reaching for a button on it is the same general motion as reaching for the radio.

I suspect the touch screen on the new one will be difficult to operate when velcroed to the dash of a moving car.

juanito - John Davey says:
September 29, 2010 at 11:29 am

Perhaps the “Zip Snip” should be marketed as “The last difficult package you'll ever struggle with!”?

Why do I equate the Zip Snip difficult plastic package opener encased in a difficult to open plastic package, with the OS recovery tools and media to restore your system from a hard drive failure, being on a recovery partition on the hard drive that is going to fail?

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 29, 2010 at 11:34 am

again I endorse the simplicity of the Ipod Shuffle.

hpoulter says:
September 29, 2010 at 1:49 pm

“Not like there's copyright issues.” Unfortunately, that recently changed for OTR downloads. I was able to burn CDs of every available Jack Benny program from the 1940 season through
1951 to make the frequent commutes between here and Chicago a little less tedious. But as of August, no more Benny. No more Burns & Allen, Lum & Abner or Charlie McCarthy either. Someone approached the estates with a plan to squeeze out a bit more revenue from these old shows. A few collections are still available, e.g. Fred Allen (“Howdy, bub!”).

You shock me. Not available at internet.org? Well, my advice is stock up now before you have to pay RadioSpirits prices for everything. I have bought several compilations from this guy before – amazing selection.

http://www.mediaoutlet.com/

**Mitchell says:**
September 29, 2010 at 3:05 pm

I got the new Nano just last weekend. I really like it and it has an FM tuner. One drawback is that it forced me to upgrade to the latest version of iTunes which then promptly lost the source to over 3000 songs and can't be loaded onto the Nano without re-establishing the link to each one, and converting them back to mp4. Irritating.

**Ian S. says:**
September 29, 2010 at 3:19 pm

“But is that really the case these days? Don't most people use a DVR to record shows and watch them later? I know if you do this through TiVo or Comcast they've got the viewershhip data.”

They do. And advertisers won't pay anything close to full rates for viewers on DVR, because they know damned well you're fast-forwarding the commercials so they're going to have maybe 3 or 4 frames to sell you the product as the ad whizzes by. This is why most of the good shows are on pay cable now.

**Brisko says:**
September 29, 2010 at 3:26 pm

I stay away from Apple entirely. I have had two Sony Walkman MP3 players in the last decade and loved them both.

It's completely plug and play and compatible with Windows Media player (for drag and drop loading) or with Sony's MusicDeck (I think that's the name) software if you want to customize playlists, etc before loading them to the player.

**hpoulter says:**
September 29, 2010 at 3:46 pm

I knew it was them dirty lawyering bastids at Radio Spirits. They served Internet Archive with a DMCA notice and made them take down many of their OTR shows. They played the same game back in the late 90s when they shut down a lot of OTR web sites and resellers. I would never buy anything from those gougers. This is a good example of why having your own physical copies is better than assuming it will always be available for streaming in “the cloud”. In the meantime, download the good OTR still on the Archive (Let George Do It and Damon Runyon Theater are two I have recently gotten into) and get the rest of the stuff from small fry that haven't been shut down yet.
Here's a good one:

http://otrarchive.blogspot.com/

Philip Scott Thomas says:
September 29, 2010 at 4:53 pm

Well, if you're going to pick someone to play out your life, you could do worse, if you're Charles Lightoller.

Generally known factoid: he was the No. 2 in charge on the Titanic, and the various Boards of Inquiry in the UK and the USA made him carry the can for the disaster.

Somewhat less well-known factoid: the White Star crew were docked their pay for failing to complete their voyage.

Even less well-known factoid: Lightoller lived a life that only a Victorian Englishman could imagine. It's straight out of a Boys' Own adventure story. There's a fairly good summation here.

And when it came to the Flotilla of Small Ships at Dunkirk, there's a good description here.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 29, 2010 at 5:15 pm

Hey, I just noticed Cookie the Dog Owner at CarLust featured the Straker car from UFO. Coincidence or fellow Lileks reader?

Noticed James L commented on CarLust.

gates says:
September 30, 2010 at 2:57 am

who wants to watch a show about a grifter screwing over people and trying to please his father?

Not me. I wanted to watch the show about the grumpy old retired Navy guy and his cute spunky sidekick, who fight terrorists together.

Mikey NTH says:
September 30, 2010 at 8:25 am

“While I like having a multiplicity of sources to provide media, managing these streams is like putting necklaces on a thrashing hydra. And there's no solution in sight – only product upon product, each controlling a particular sliver.”

There is a solution – don’t do it.

What? Not the right answer? Well, shoot.

Tuffy the Tuna says:
September 30, 2010 at 8:57 am

Thanks for the links, hpouler. Just to clarify, I orginally said I was getting these shows from OTR, but in reality it's the achive.org site.
Dan says:
September 30, 2010 at 10:32 am

Caption for that last screencap:
- “I would like the truth.”
- “My good man, you would not be able to handle the truth.”

John says:
September 30, 2010 at 10:44 am

Why, yes. With your head of hair I expect that you would float in the event we hit an iceberg & the ship sank. Why do you ask?

DensityDuck says:
September 30, 2010 at 1:17 pm

“People don’t pirate because it’s easier, they pirate because they don’t want to pay.”

Actually, they increasingly *do* pirate because it’s easier.

Well, let me qualify that a bit. You could, really, still say that people pirate because they don’t want to pay. But what people don’t want to *pay* for is the specialized unique device that is the only thing that can play the media file in the rightsholder's chosen format which nobody else uses, and which nobody else will ever use in the future. They don't want to have to schedule their entire life around When Is This Going To Be On–time is money, and they’d rather spend their time as they choose. They don't want to have to worry that someone will dig a ditch through a fiber-optic cable in Nebraska and suddenly all their media disappears.

So it's still true--with enough equivocation--that people pirate because they don’t want to pay. But you have to stretch the definition of “pay” pretty far to get there.

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As for TV: Interestingly enough, I find that people are much happier to pay when they feel that the money is going directly towards the creators of what they're buying. What the industry needs to do is get past the notion of “direct to video is cheap crap that's not a real market”, because--well, look at the internet, which is Direct To Video writ large. Imagine if Joss Whedon, instead of blowing all his fan-built goodwill on a single theatrical production, instead did episodes of “Firefly” direct-to-video every year. I’d be happy to pay twelve bucks per one-hour episode if I knew that it was going to fund the production of the next episode. (Particularly since a home-video release is much less subject to content restriction and management interference.)

Petronius says:
September 30, 2010 at 1:52 pm

Below is a listing of shows cancelled after only one episode, and I suspect it is not complete. As you see, many of them were from the pre-focus group era. Of particular interest was the Rosie O'Donnell show, which apparently barely made it through the last commercial.

Augh! Late for school! C’mon! Bus any minute and you’re on the computer!

Sorry sorry sorry just uploading something sorry!

What could be so BLOODY IMPORTANT you have to upload it at 8:32 in the morning? Let’s go! HOW CAN YOU EAT YOUR MEAT IF YOU DON’T CATCH THE BUS

And so it began. There’s usually panic and catastrophe in the morning, no matter how serene it starts. She is owly in the morning, sometimes, and I remember how I was owly in the morning as a kid, and how much I hated being told I was owly, but it’s a great word, so I continue the generational cascade of insult and injury, and say “don’t be so owly.” Which makes her owlier. The dog barks for scraps; my drop-dead gorgeous wife, looking as ever like a fashion model, grabs her coffee and heads out; I usher the child outside, insist on one last hair-combing on the porch IN FRONT OF THE WORLD, which prompts another argument, and then she goes and I close the door and stand at the window watching her tromp down the sidewalk to the bus stop. I feel useful for a moment, watching her go. But it’s an illusion. She doesn’t need me to watch her walk away. She probably doesn’t think I watch. And she’d be slightly hurt if I made a point of saying I don’t watch her go. It’s called “Ten Years Old.”

I always turn around when she’s at the corner, and I see the dog looking at me: we good? Anything more? And then I go back to work.
Warm day, broad flowing sunlight; most of the trees along the creek have turned, but the ones that start guard on the boulevard of Jasperwood are still maintaining a solid front of green. The Tsar probably thought everything was fine when he looked out the palace window and saw a row of guards, too.

Took time out to walk down the street and shoot some leaves against an autumn-hued building, my old friend Advance-Thresher.

Listened to Gershwin piano music; ain’t I cul-chered? His music trips all kinds of switches – it’s so American, and so specific to a time, and a place, but it’s still an abstract study of the culture from which it came. You never heard his brilliant piano work when you were walking down the street. Maybe you might pass an apple-seller whistling Swanee. But when you walked into the concert hall – it was warm and stuffy; winter outside but overheated in here, so you took off your coat, handed it to the coat-check girl, went through the doors, and heard something that summed up everything outside. Took the musical vernacular of the smart set and the guys on the other end of town and braided it all together into something impossibly good.

The piano pieces are the most intimate, as you’d imagine, and they’re small, wry, rueful, madly romantic, jaunty. The piano drives my favorite works of his, and I don’t just mean Rhapsody in Blue, aka “everyone’s favorite piece of classical music.” There’s the Second Rhapsody – yes, he wrote another – and the Piano Concerto, which I came to know as a kid only through the “Best of Gershwin” CBS Columbia album. It had only the 3rd movement, which itself is a greatest-hits version of the entire concerto. Later I’d find the 2nd movement, and it took me years to get it. It’s not Beethoven-level material; his orchestral work was always episodic, assembled from contiguous blocks, but what episodes. Doesn’t matter if you can see the seams. When I got to the end of the movement I was in my car, and I rolled down the windows and turned it up. A guy thing, perhaps.
When I got home I sat on the steps and listened to a few more piano pieces and whistled along. There wasn't anyone around. Sometimes a fella just wants to sit on his steps and whistle Gershwin.

Anyway. As I said, the smaller pieces now hit me more than the big marquee numbers, which I'm sure is one of those middle-aged things; the great Sweeping Passions of Youth are observed in recollection, but a sweet little bittersweet Gershwin piano number is like a good bourbon; it's smooth, it hits you were you live, and there's a little burn, too. Unlike the orchestra numbers, the piano pieces just flow, and that's what I was thinking about as I was walking around taking pictures of expiring trees: I'd give anything to write one great melody with the effortless simplicity and inevitability of these works. Words are nice, but music is portable. Someone can quote you, if you manage to assemble a thought with the requisite pith, but a melody is something else. I was sitting on my steps whistling from memory something someone invented 80 years ago, and if I don't hear it for ten years I could still whistle it.

When you go back to movies of the 30s and 40s you find middle-brow flicks about composers, and there's always a Gershwin vibe about them, without the cheer. They're driven! They have the pulse of the street in their blood! They sit in rooms banging away at the grand, smoking, stopping, writing something on the paper, then banging away again until the lead actress comes in the room to console him, assure him it will be okay, the symphony will find an audience, she just knows it. I haven't read a bio of Gershwin but I doubt that was the case. Like any job, it's a job. But he managed to identify an American archetype I don't think we've seen for years or will see again – a musician who marries “high” and “low” culture into something distinct with universal appeal.

And now it gets spooky. I have a recording of the piano rolls Gershwin cut, his own performance of his work as he heard it in his head – fast, nervy, heedless. The rolls were fed into modern computer-assisted pianos capable of reproducing dynamics, and the results are remarkable. But as this short video shows you, it's like a seance. No: it's like those plaster casts of the victims of Pompeii. You know the story: they were buried in rock and ash, the bodies evaporated, and centuries later they poured plaster into the empty spaces to define the shape left by the vacant soul. It's like that. He's here. But he's not.
The Three Preludes, the most famous of the solo piano pieces.

So that was my day. It was more, of course; I wrote, and wrote a lot. Seven blog entries, a column, a Joe Ohio. (Twenty-six in the bag now. Best work in a long time.) You work, you fill up the day, you tote it up when the day is done, and figure you earned your stint on the right side of the dirt. I have the usual panoply of failings as a person and a parent, but I think I’ve instilled in my daughter one lesson: make something every day. Make something that wasn’t there before. Produce. It's what we're here to do, after all.

While we were waiting for the Chinese food to be ready after karate she wanted to show me the drawing she’d put up on her page. She said she liked the background more than the pose because the back legs were kinda weird.
Was this what you were uploading this morning?

Well, yeah.

I put my hand on my heart and apologized. Not for insisting she had to make the bus, but for raising my voice. Just because you're creating doesn't mean the bus will wait for you.

Well duh, she said.

That's the second lesson. So she has that one solid, too.

42 RESPONSES TO andante, adagio

juanito - John Davey says:
September 30, 2010 at 9:53 am

7:53 PDT and we, too, are running late for getting to school. But my girls are in love with Natalie's Art!! They requested that I indicate with a comment, their joy with today's art post before we run out the door.

So, one thing accomplished today....

grs says:
September 30, 2010 at 10:13 am

How nice to start the day with some Gershwin.

KCSteve says:
September 30, 2010 at 10:35 am

The name for the background is ‘bokeh’. It's a Japanese term for a blurred background and, in photography, lenses are rated for
having either good bokeh or bad bokeh.

I shoot Minolta (which became Konica-Minolta and is now Sony) and their lenses were almost always known for good bokeh, *except* the 500mm mirror lens. Because that lens is really a little reflector telescope the ‘bokeh’ is made up of little donuts.

Just some obscure bits to give you (and or Natalie) something to do web searches on.

And I have to say, doing an *illustration* with such good bokeh – *that* is something!

swschrad says:
September 30, 2010 at 10:50 am

*bokeh*. interesting. how would you produce lenses that fall off the cliff once you get out of focus, out of depth?

it would have to be something like a tight barrel and “ah, hell, we need a concave, and we already have this one in inventory” and throw all the non-central beam into the barrel and lose all that light.

bgbear (roger h) says:
September 30, 2010 at 11:01 am

Nice to see talent coupled with discipline.

I have a talented nephew, music, art, etc., that my mother and sister just were darn sure was/is going to make it big. He is just plain lazy. Any comment I made in this regard was as welcomed as the Tea Party member at a Town Hall.

hpoulter says:
September 30, 2010 at 11:05 am

The Zombie Gershwin piece is interesting, but it would be better without someone talking in the background.

My favorite ersatz Gershwin movie moment is the gawd-awful “Tenement Symphony” in the Marx Brothers flick “the Big Store”.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xEOCCaXOoc

Of course, this musical zircon goes over really big with the audience in the movie.

Mxymaster says:
September 30, 2010 at 11:18 am

Lesson three: Don't say “duh” to your elders.

Steve Allen once did a duet with the Gershwin rolls. Too bad he didn't cut his own; we could have a ghost roll duet.

RobertB says:
September 30, 2010 at 11:28 am

Interesting: I've never encountered the word “owly” before (except maybe here). And none of my usual online dictionaries know it. But the meaning is clear from context, and it is a good word (though perhaps unfair to owls).
I'm guessing it's either a regional thing, or one of those curious family words that one is surprised to find nobody else uses. I'll have to see if I can work it into my daily life (shouldn't be hard, as I have a twelve-year-old daughter).

JohnW says:
September 30, 2010 at 11:42 am

“The rolls were fed into modern computer-assisted pianos capable of reproducing dynamics”
Mod-ren, eh? Reproducing pianos have been around since about nineteen-and-ought something. (My cousin used to collect them.) And what's amazing to me about the Gershwin rolls he cut (?) is the tempo – I want to go “George, George, slow down! Its not supposed to be that fast!”

Tom says:
September 30, 2010 at 11:57 am

That picture of the Advance-Thresher building pushes all my buttons. If you posted a his-res version of it, I would print it out, frame it, hang it up and call it art (because it is), and if you offered it for sale, I might even buy it.

Charlie Young says:
September 30, 2010 at 12:01 pm

I first encountered the term “owly” when I met my mother-in-law to be in the early 90s. She was born and raised in northeast Iowa and she said she got it from her mother who had German and Irish connections. I still haven't heard the term outside of Iowa before James. I guess it has roots in the Midwest.

Also, regarding bokeh. I assume any well built lens for any application can be made to have this quality. Typically, a lens with a wider aperture (f 1.2 to f 2.8) has pretty nice bokeh due to the narrow depth-of-field when wide open. There are other characteristics of the glass and number of elements used in the lens that will also affect this quality as well as other characteristics of lens behavior.

swschrad says:
September 30, 2010 at 12:13 pm

@bgbear: I am having those issues with a family member we are having to move out of an estate home.

if the person would work one-tenth as hard at any job in the universe as they are working to not work, they could break China's back.

have even had a 2-hour meeting with our pastor to make sure we are not driving forward in anything other than love and concern.

I will never figure that out.

Kevin says:
September 30, 2010 at 12:16 pm

(G)Nat sure has a future in anime-style drawing!
**Ric Locke** says:  
September 30, 2010 at 12:28 pm

I reckon I'm just a Philistine. I can't make music myself, but I do enjoy the great majority of it, and keyboard instruments are no exception. I even like accordion music 😊

But if the piano had never been invented, my world would be a better place.

Regards,  
Ric

**bgbear (roger h)** says:  
September 30, 2010 at 12:38 pm

“owly” might be one of those words that comes about by sounding like a foreign phrase/word.

I am thinking like how “schmerz” got turned into “smarts” or “shiksa” gets turned into “chick” or “vaquero” to “buckaroo”.  

However, I can also see how a night owl might be grumpy in the morning.

**RKN** says:  
September 30, 2010 at 1:02 pm

With regard to that entire “owly” paragraph, what a nicely written vignette of a Father's moment in time. For a second I forgot I was reading a blog, had the pull of a short story.

**Brian Lutz** says:  
September 30, 2010 at 2:05 pm

Well, I suppose that beats gargling Gershwin...

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wjz9pDjTu8I

**Mark E. Hurling** says:  
September 30, 2010 at 2:20 pm

I mentioned this last time our Genial Host used owly, but since this time it seems to have sparked more commentary I'll repeat it. I only heard the word used once by a 3rd cousin “Uncle Fred” when he was in his 80's and I was a wee one of 9. I asked my mother later what it meant and she said grumpy, like an owl is when you drag him out of his nest in the barn rafters during the day. I agree it is almost certainly a regional Midwest term, but given Charlie Young's observation it just could be of corrupted German origin.

**boblipton** says:  
September 30, 2010 at 2:38 pm

My mother's been dead for eighteen years, but as I remarked to my father a couple of months ago, she's always with me, and so is he. And even though I'm on the far side of the half-century mark, there are still times when I stop, realize that my mother was, somehow, talking about exactly this situation, and she was precisely right.

How good to know that Natalie sees it now. Even if she's entering that tough period in life when she will struggle to reinvent herself
only to discover, probably, that she was always herself anyway.

Which is what today's piece was. Well, duh.

Bob

Bob

**kevin** says:

September 30, 2010 at 2:39 pm

This part of the post “the great Sweeping Passions of Youth are observed in recollection, but a sweet little bittersweet Gershwin piano number is like a good bourbon; it's smooth, it hits you were you live, and there's a little burn, too.”

Reminds me of one of my favorite Joe Henry songs “God Only Knows” from “Civilians”. The man knows how to write lyrics....

“Lovers laugh and cross this way,
they're weaving out into the street.
It seems we never were so young
or it was never quite so sweet.

But the world is always beautiful
when its seen in full retreat..
The worst of life looks beautiful
as it slips away in full retreat..

Well God only knows that we can do,
no more or less than he'll allow..
Well God only knows that we mean well
and God knows that we just don't know how”

**Maharinness of Franistan** says:

September 30, 2010 at 4:00 pm

@ Kevin: You call it lyrics, I call it poetry. Except poetry, nowadays, is not suposed to rhyme. Or scan.

Or should I say:

Except poetry
nowadays is not
supposed
to rhyme or
scan.

**ExGeeEye** says:

September 30, 2010 at 4:34 pm

Depending on type
“Poetry” follows odd and
Unusual rules.

Indeed, there's a type that is logical
Which frequently turns scatological,
The dirty of mind
Will frequently find
That now reigns here / A very, very–pajock.

HORATIO
You might have rhymed.

😊
MJBirch says:
September 30, 2010 at 4:45 pm

I used to listen to a Sunday morning program on NPR called “Schiekele Mix” (PDQ Bach presiding) He played the orchestrated version of “Rhapsody in Blue” with the Gershwin piano roll. Insane — insanely fast. Had kind of an Elmer Fudd quality.

hpoulter says:
September 30, 2010 at 5:03 pm

JohnW: Yeah, but the point is: dynamics. The old player pianos gave every note the same value of intensity and duration, which is why they have that plinka-plinka quality. I don’t quite understand how they can infer the dynamics of the original pianist from a paper roll, but apparently the information is there – this has been done for awhile – I remember hearing “Scott Joplin plays Scott Joplin” back in the 80s.

JohnW says:
September 30, 2010 at 5:29 pm

hpoulter: No, not ‘player’ pianos – ‘reproducing’ pianos. There’s a difference. The latter do vary in intensity, volume, duration, and yes, even use the foot pedals. Hence the name. The result is indistinguishable from a human player.

swschrad says:
September 30, 2010 at 5:54 pm

iirc there were true reproducing pianos 100 years ago. expensive and temperamental is how the tale is told.

lanczos says:
September 30, 2010 at 6:05 pm

Ah, Jimmeh, Jimmeh, Jimmeh. Just wait until she’s 13 or 14. She may well want to be awakened early, so she can walk around the block, and approach the School Bus Stop from a direction Other Than Your House.

That’s when you hope that The Brain Has Been Programmed, because it won’t show anymore.

Maybe as an undergrad, she will talk with you about grades and majors and all that stuff. And then she will listen.

Mine did, and after almost dropping out of high school, now at age 29 she is a Sr. Regional Engr. Mgr. for a major solar power company, with a BA in Arch. Engr. from a Top-2 AE University.

You never know where their path goes until it goes there...

KeithF says:
September 30, 2010 at 6:39 pm

Here’s a bit more spooky. After reading the blog this evening, I thought, yeah, music, that’s what’s missing. I had the CD player set to random, it has about 400 CDs. I turn it on and the CD is Gershwin and the 1st track is Rhapsody in Blue. I’m listening to it as I type.
Spooky, indeed!

**hpoulter** says:
September 30, 2010 at 7:03 pm

JohnW – I stand corrected – but that explains how the dynamics were recorded – I can only assume that the computerized gizmos are supposed to do a better job of reproducing.

**Gene Dillenburg** says:
September 30, 2010 at 8:19 pm


**Music Review « Cultural Rumbles** says:
October 1, 2010 at 3:12 am

[...] In the meantime, Lileks has the music beat covered. Enjoy some Gerswhin, from — Uncategorized — Doing some writing now. No comments yet Click here to cancel reply. [...] 

**Cory** says:
October 1, 2010 at 6:02 am

Hard to argue Gershwin is not the greatest composer of the 20th Century, certainly American, probably anywhere, given all the things he wrote so well in so many styles.

Take the Muppet gargling Summertime.

The mark of a great song is that completely different versions and styles will all sound good. It’s hard to ruin a song like Summertime—it would sound good in heavy metal.

My favorite version is Janis Joplin’s but Billy Stewart’s is pretty good and they are not even the best known or adhering to the traditional form. I think Gershwin would applaud them and I think he would even like a Scottish Muppet gargling it.

If it’s not the best song written in the last century, it’s sure in the class photo—and considering Rhapsody, it might not be the best thing he ever wrote.

**abe c. can** says:
October 1, 2010 at 7:29 am

Not a camera enthusiast, but I know some japanese. “Background” is usually translated as ??(haikei).?Boke (either ??or ???has to do with senility or becoming senile (??)). But its use is wide ranging, for instance “jet lag” in japanese is expressed as “time difference senility” (???, jisaboke). In two man comedy routines, the person playing dumb is also referred to as ?? And in discussions of lenses, with regard to the blurring of a background, ?? is also used. Though it is slang and better, more technical terms also exist. Next time you’re in a duty free camera store in Tokyo though, I’d be careful with my use of ???Hopefully the salesperson won’t get the wrong idea, for, them thar’s a fightin’ word too. As in “you senile bastard....”

**abe c. can** says:
October 1, 2010 at 7:32 am

Apologies, it seems James’ site isn’t able to show kanji and kana
which makes my uninteresting and tangential comment even more so.

kevin says:
October 1, 2010 at 7:48 am

Oh yeah, my favorite version of “Summertime” has got to be the Louis Armstrong/Ella Fitzgerald duet. Sublime. Have to listen to it every summer, on a hot, sultry night on the porch.

Bill Peschel says:
October 1, 2010 at 9:33 am

Interesting. We’ve been listening to the Gershwin piano rolls CD lately — we pop on a CD while we eat lunch, since we tend to read and hate to hear chewing — and the stepson had been asking for Gershwin music, so I got several more from the library. Herbie Hancock did a version that's pretty good; playing it mostly straight.

I can’t find the link, but one of the general cultural sites (read: articles about Wagner alongside the latest YouTube meme) had a piece about Rhapsody in Blue. Gershwin did it to fulfill a charge from bandleader Paul Whiteman, who wanted to put on an evening of modern American jazz. But George was working on a show and had trouble finding the time and was ready to bail, but Paul urged him to give him something, anything. So, when George wasn’t working on the musical — during cab rides, late at night, literally whenever he found the time — he’d work on Rhapsody.

Think on that the next time some precious writer whines about not finding the time to write his next opus. (“Hey, whatcha looking at me for, buddy? You looking for a knuckle sammich?”)

Cory says:
October 1, 2010 at 10:34 am

Here's Janis:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A27FF2T2z2k&feature=related

Here's Louis and Ella:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIDOEsQL7lA

Can't argue with either one. What happens when you put superb song with superb artists backed by superb musicians

Notice all three performers can be identified with one name and there is no question who you are talking about.

hpoulter says:
October 1, 2010 at 10:41 am

It's quiet…too quiet.

Ryan says:
October 1, 2010 at 2:35 pm

That is one damn talented daughter you've got there, Mr. Lileks. As somebody with abosolutely NO artistic skill (all of my talents are more on the mathematical/technological side of the spectrum), I am always highly impressed when I see the work of somebody with natural artistic talent. And one so young? Geez.
raf says:
October 1, 2010 at 9:48 pm

My favorite version of “Summertime” is from the old Gary Moore show back in the 50s(?). He had a guest who found people in the phone book to approximate the lyrics and had them sing their names. Something like:

Inda Good Ole Summerstein
Inda Good Ole Summerstein
Walker Inda Shady Lane
Witcher Beebe Mein
Hugh Holder Hand Blank See Hold Yores
Sam Datz Avery Good Sine
Shays Ur Toosey Woosey
Inda Good Ole Summerstein

Summerstein, by the way, couldn't hold a tune for the three notes it took to sing his name.

Kev says:
October 2, 2010 at 11:31 am

I have the usual panoply of failings as a person and a parent, but I think I've instilled in my daughter one lesson: make something every day. Make something that wasn't there before. Produce. It's what we're here to do, after all.

Great words to live by. And–not to turn this thread the wrong way this late in the game–but those sentences should be pasted on the bathroom mirrors of everyone who is employed in our nation's capital, as a lot of them seem to have forgotten this.

Steve Allen once did a duet with the Gershwin rolls. Too bad he didn't cut his own; we could have a ghost roll duet.

As Dave Barry might say, Ghost Roll Duet would be a good name for a(n Americana-tinged) rock band.

Jeremy Packard says:
October 9, 2010 at 1:18 pm

Jersey Shore slap down! http://tiny.cc/snookisnooki