

# The Last Word™

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## The Plopping Principle

Janet Jackson should record a new version of “The Pleasure Principle” and call it “The Plopping Principle.”

Did Donald Trump win the “election” in part because of this theory? If poo.

According to legend, people—somewhere—actually voted for him. For President, no less. Of the United States of America. The most powerful country in the big, mean world—the same world that’s laughing at Donald Trump. Who are these mysterious Trump voters? One must surmise that some must be people who secretly like ploppings.

As you know, a plopping is when someone puts something in a toilet bowl that doesn’t belong there. As you also know, Bishop Brossart High School was the plopping capital of the world in my day. People plopped scissors, balloons, you name it! A lot of people don’t want to admit ploppings are funny. In public, they lament each plopping—because ploppings ruin stuff. But deep down, they can’t hold in their laughter. It’s like when the news interviewed the cop about people peeing on stuff at the library, and he looked like he was trying to keep from bursting out laughing.

Similarly, some people think Donald Trump is funny. They won’t admit to voting for him. But apparently they voted for him because they needed a good laugh. Oh, he thinks he’s a riot. But he’s not. I saw an article before the “election” that said that if the racist billionaire won, it may actually destroy the Republican Party. I hope it does destroy it, but I wasn’t going to gamble.

You may also be aware that small towns in the Midwest compose the Plopping Belt—where ploppings are unusually popular. If you’ve seen the new election map, you’ll notice the Donald overperformed the most in the Plopping Belt.

If the Plopping Principle decided the “election”, people just plopped away their job security and healthcare. When Trump offshores their factory jobs or privatizes their Medicaid, the guffaws will stop—for 2 years until the right-wing media lets everyone forget like what always happens.

(Insightful note I can’t fit anywhere else: After Matt Bevin won the 2015 “election” for Governor of Kentucky—which was rigged—his apologists compared him to a tough but firm parent trying to discipline the Bluegrass State’s unruly people. So much for the Republicans being for limited government!)

## My bad attitude

We have a serious problem in our society when kids comply with everything. Frankly, it has to stop.

Today’s young people need to learn how to kick and scream. Not because they don’t get exactly what they want, but because they’re having important decisions made for them by others when they’re competent to do it themselves. Some people who are grown now—and not just me—are very sensitive about this, and some still have to be comforted.

I’m 43 going on 14. I have a really bad attitude about certain things, and it’s served me well. At least I’ve been told I have a bad attitude. A “bad attitude” was always one of these things adults complained about whenever kids stood up to them. I have to give my hard-working parents credit because I don’t remember them ever saying I had a “bad attitude.” Other authority figures said it all the time. I responded by mimicking them in a whiny voice: “You have a bad attitude, nyeh nyeh nyeh!” I shut a lot of youthful travails out of my mind for decades, but keeping my attitude in check when confronted by them would have caused some very real problems.



I found a posting on a parenting website from a woman talking about how her 9-year-old son utterly lost his shit because he found out he needed glasses. He threatened to snap his brand new specs clean in half. Smart kid. Maybe he really did need glasses, and I can't condone him breaking them, because someone out there needed them if he didn't. But it's the attitude that's important.

That message was posted years ago, and by my calculations, the youngster would be about 17 now. I hope he continued his attitude. If he was allowed to keep it up, it may have saved him from totalitarian impositions like school uniforms. If his attitude was suppressed, odds are he's going to be miserable for years to come—until he comes to his senses when he's about 35. The breakage of a \$400 pair of glasses is nothing compared to the breakage of an entire society caused by school uniforms.

Speaking of which, I'm going to ask a question I've asked many times before, because it's loomed at the forefront of my conscience for 20 years: *Why do so many kids today tolerate being forced to wear uniforms in public schools?* We never would have put up with this fascism in *public* schools in my day. Surveys show kids overwhelmingly don't like it, but the harm to their personal wholeness and individuality is an urgent reason to defy it. What can a public school possibly do to kids who won't wear the uniform? Since school is compulsory, it's hard to see how they can kick them out. If you want uniforms, go to a private school instead.

Teamwork has a right time and place. One of the things I like about Dungeons & Dragons is that it teaches teamwork. School uniforms don't teach teamwork, but groupthink. Some rules are put in place for a good reason. Uniforms aren't.

You still see bits and pieces of principled defiance from today's young people, but not much that sticks. Sometimes I stumble upon YouTube accounts of suburban parents who post slickly produced videos documenting their kids' boring activities each day, and it makes my skin crawl. If my folks made YouTube clips when I was growing up, not only would it be a hell of a lot more interesting, but I could also guarantee you'd hear an occasional "I won't!" Right-wing loudmouths keep complaining that today's kids are being treated as precious snowflakes who can't accept being told no, but the real problem with today's kids is that they accept it too much. Trust me, they'll be so much happier if they're allowed to think for themselves.

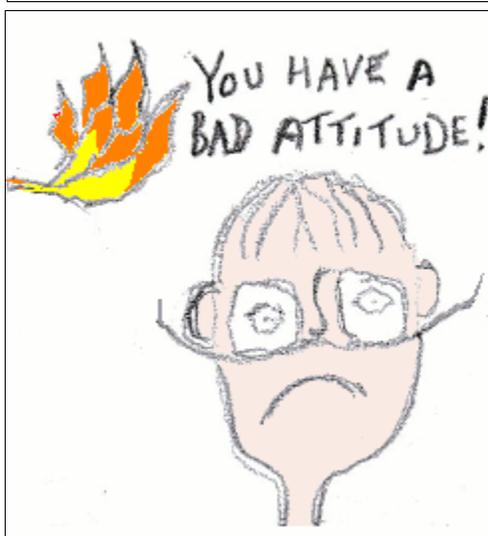
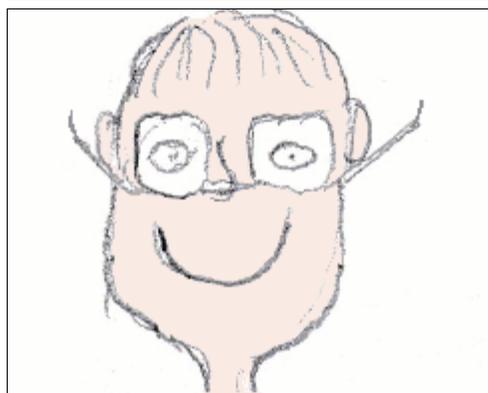
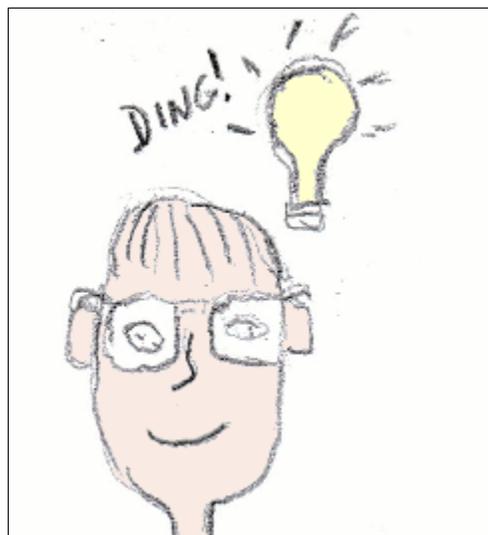
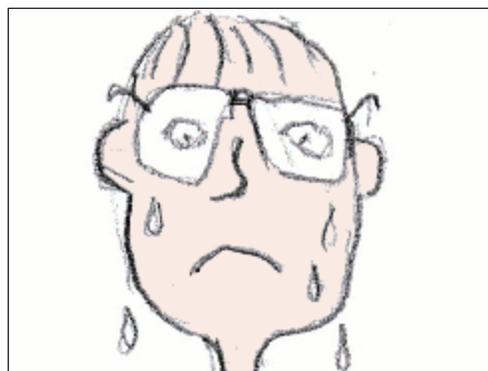
One thing is for sure: The statement "I'm the adult and you're not" is never a good justification even when the adult is right. Too often, authority figures wouldn't explain why I was wrong. They said I was wrong just because.

Lately I've become more confident in my attitude, and I've had some help. I still think it's preposterous that a school official when I attended NKU harangued me that I was being "defiant", even though this was after I'd been beaten down for years. It shows how hostile NKU is to dissent. Incidentally, I was also getting quite fed up at the time—the mid-'90s—with people sniffing and sniveling when I dared to point out when something was clearly wrong or unconstitutional. They were engaging in gaslighting.

Think. Do. Be.

## I rocked my weight "problem"

If you knew me in 1997, you'd be utterly floored that I've had any weight problem other than being dangerously underweight. For a 24-year-old man to be 5' 10" and only 115 pounds was not a plus. It was like I had a tapeworm or something. The difficulty in finding food in 1997—and the fact that I had no money to buy it, because I lost my job and the economic "boom" of the time was a hoax by the right-wing media—contributed to my condition, but I was also very thin before and after that awful era.



But did you know that in recent months I've been officially classed as desperately obese according to the government's BMI standard that everyone is supposed to worship? Let that sink in for a moment: They think I'm obese. Me, of all people.

This past June, I destroyed the scales at 226 pounds. I'm proud to say that officially made me obese under the BMI rules that were barked down in the late '90s. Not just overweight, but *obese*. Granted, it's almost impossible for most people to have a "normal" weight under these rules. It's like the Special K commercial that made everyone think they were on the brink of demise if they could "pinch more than an inch", even though everyone in my kindergarten class could do it. Only a real diet dictator would pay heed to these guidelines, because they're so ridiculously out of reach for most people.

I didn't look anywhere close to 226, because I still had very skinny limbs, for all the weight was going to my tum-tum. I wasn't embarrassed by weighing 226. If people wanted to go around saying I weighed 226, it would have been a factual statement.

I didn't feel much lousier than usual. I'd been periodically bedridden for decades—regardless of weight. Since age 17, I've had a very serious, disabling health condition that is beyond the scope of this article, and I couldn't get help for it until recently. Feeling constantly tired and weak was normal for me. But when I got up to 226, I figured I better do *something*. I didn't want to be a zealot about it, but I had to draw the line.

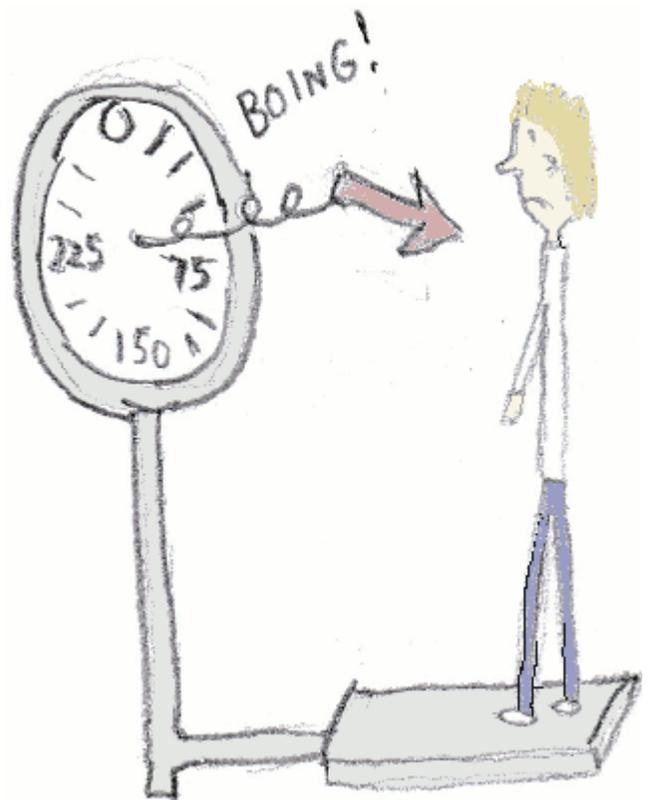
Maybe my alleged obesity was contributing to poor health. *Maybe*. I can't say for sure. At first I thought it was like the punk rocker teeth: something society frowns upon but doesn't have any real health risks. When I was about 11, I read in a book that straight teeth last longer, but I've never had any health problems caused by those kick-ass crooked teeth. Those jagged chompers are still there, looking cool in their natural state. Recently I discovered the dental floss industry even makes floss just for me, that's thin enough to navigate the Rock Pile. If punk rocker teeth are so bad, why would the floss biz encourage me to keep being awesome by making a product just for me? Gotcha on that! But I guess it was *possible* that weighing too much was ruining my health. It may have been depriving me of what little energy I had. So I started walking off the excess weight. This effort got a big boost in August when I heard the famous laxative gum story. I laughed almost continuously for weeks on end, which shed 10 pounds.

I repeat: I'm not a boring weight loss zealot. If I fail, I fail. I don't want to be one of these thin people who obsesses over losing weight for reasons of vanity. My lack of vanity is considered freaky by a conforming few, but I'm just expressing my unspoiled individuality. It confounds all naysayers!

When I went to the bubble gum doctor later, they didn't say I needed to lose weight—even though their scale overcounts patients' weight by quite a bit. But they determined my thyroid was on the eve of destructment, which I think led to my sensational weight gain. They prescribed a powerful drug for

hypothyroidism, and in only a few weeks, my weight fell further to 198—right after the anti-Trump protest in Cincinnati where a Trumpthug showed up on Fountain Square with an assault rifle strapped to his body. Later it fell to 195.

It's impressive that the Affordable Care Act has led to me finally being diagnosed or treated for serious illnesses I have that weren't dealt with before. If Reagan hadn't obstructed a much broader effort in the 1980s, a lot of grief could have been avoided. For decades, most medical press seemed to deal with matters of vanity or made-up spindromes like ADHD. (Before anyone says I'm wrong to deny the existence of ADHD, I'll have you know I was diagnosed with it too—hence the Ritalin that demolished my thyroid. So bust goes that bubble.) It



was only under President Obama that the medical establishment opted to wise up a little and focus more on real health concerns. Which is a real threat to my health: punk rocker teeth or hypothyroidism? The real world is not YouTube.

If you need to lose weight, it's great if you can do it. But I don't want to shame anyone just because they can't. I'd feel like I was living in a right-wing dictatorship if everyone was required to have the exact same body shape or wear the exact same clothes. I'm sure that's Donald Trump's next move.

## A person chewed gum at a play

Did you know I once had a classmate who chewed gum when they were expressly prohibited from doing so? I bet you're shocked!

It happened in November 1986, when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the nun-run autocracy of St. Joseph's School in Cold Spring, Kentucky. One day, we went on a field trip to a theater in Cincinnati to view a play. I believe it was the stage adaptation of Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog Of Calaveras County"—not "The Frog Who Chewed Bubble Gum", which was something I made up completely, as you know. Gum was about the last thing on my mind in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So I didn't pay much attention when our literature teacher warned all of us that we wouldn't be allowed to chew gum during the play. Yes, that was an Allowed Cloud!

The play was at Music Hall, Taft Theater, or some other ornate venue, but the idea of a sane and broadminded person chomping beegie in such a fancy environment should not offend. Why, it would only enhance the experience. Apparently, someone else thought so too.

As we were seated in the theater just before the play started, a familiar scent wafted through our row. It was a flavor of Bubblicious—something approaching peach—that was popular then. After the fragrance loomed for a couple minutes, a girl in my class who was a few seats over from me declared, "Somebody's chewing gum."

Thanks for the news flash, Kermit.

I can assure you it wasn't me. I was quite adept at chewing pencil erasers or paper and hiding it under my tongue, but I wasn't the gummer at this play. In fact, I don't know who it was. I didn't see anybody's jaw in motion during the play as if they were masticating beegie. I also did not witness a pink bubble escape anybody's lips. Nor did I see anyone peel off the remnants of a burst bubble from their glasses or underwear. I also didn't detect the telltale snapping sound.

But make no mistake: Someone was gumming. An intelligent person might say they worked that gum like a gummer.

Although I saw no jaw movements indicative of bubble gum bustin', mouths did move. Throughout the play, the boy sitting next to me kept making this loud grunting noise we always used to make: "*Hraaaaah! Hraaaaah!*" It was sort of like a sigh from the back of the throat. On some other occasions besides this field trip, it was accompanied by Darth Vader sounds, but I had the impression that the purpose of this grunt was to spread germs. True to form, I came down with some horrible infection during the course of the play and had to miss school for days. It was the first of a series of excruciating ailments like this that dogged me until I was expelled from Bishop Brossart. I wasn't allowed to see a doctor for them, because our junk insurance didn't cover it. It covered psychiatric quackery—but not much that was important.

Oddly, the teacher never seemed to notice that someone gummed during the play. I so wish she had. The resultant harangue would have been uproarious.

I can hazard a wild, wild guess at which student chewed gum during the play—only because I happened to see him chew bubble gum once in that era, and he tended to buffoonishly flout school rules. (Also, he used to fart in church. This once prompted our homeroom teacher to admonish, "Everyone's flatulent from time to time but there's no need to make a big production out of it.") But I don't have enough evidence to seriously consider him a suspect. Thirty years later, the mystery of who beegied at that play remains unsolved—much like another 8<sup>th</sup> grade mystery: that of who kept humming "Hail To The Chief" in a funny voice in the classroom one day.



## Lookin' for gum in all the wrong places

Think. Do. Be. Or more accurately in this case: Chew. Bubble. Bust.

In our previous ish of this comic endeavor, I told you I have a friend who chews gum only occasionally but is sorely disappointed she can't find gum at the local Kroger supermarket.

It turns out that her disappointment in this store's lack of gum is well-founded, assuming she only wants a good bubble bustin' gum—which would usually be specifically labeled as *bubble* gum, not just gum. What intelligent middle-aged person doesn't want to bubble with their gum until their crowns rust? On the other hand, if that's what she wants, she's been lookin' for gum in all the wrong places, lookin' for gum on too many faces. This store has some, but it's a very, very limited selection.

I've goed Krogering at that location many times in recent weeks, and the fact is, even if I was a nonstop gummer, I can't find much gum there I'd actually want to buy. I inspected both the candy aisle and the checkout lanes, and almost all the gum I saw was the sugarless brands that are full of dangerous chemicals. Most of that wasn't specially marked as *bubble* gum. The only one I saw with this labeling was the pink Trident, and they managed to get it wrong by calling it "bubblegum"—as if it's all one word.

Jimmy Carter was the best President of my lifetime, but even he wasn't perfect. In 1980, he declared Trident the White House's official chewing gum because he liked the flavors. Maybe he bubbled! At least ol' Jimmy was smart enough to wait until after he already lost reelection to issue this proclamation.

Most sugar-free gums are sweetened with artificial sweeteners like aspartame that cause cancer or are a gluten hazard for anyone who must avoid gluten because of certain disorders. I think most folks would rather rock a mouth full of fillings from chomping sugary beegee than risk cancer by ingesting aspartame.

I saw almost no sugared gums at this grocery. I looked very hard and finally noticed there were about 3 small rolls of Bubble Tape remaining in the checkout lane. But most adults want bubble gum that's marketed to adults—not a product that looks like something only a 6-year-old would like. Worse, Bubble Tape has also jumped the shark: According to the Bubble Tape website, it now inexplicably includes both sugar and aspartame, thus alienating absolutely everyone.

But there's some good news: My friend may want to hoard quarters, because on the way out, I noticed the store actually had a couple gumball machines. One of them, however, had gumballs so big you'd need a mouth like an alligator (as Quiet Riot would say) to chew them. They were about baseball sized. In other words, the only gum you can still find at this Kroger that appears to be free of poisonous artificial sweeteners is in the gumball machine (though I'm being presumptive even about that).

It would have been nifty if I found a huge bucket of Dubble Bubble, so in case my friend has any teeth pulled and can't chew for a month, I could buy it and place the bucket next to her TV set with the oval Dubble Bubble logo facing her so it taunts her every time she tries to relax. I'd also draw a laughing face on the bubble that the kid on the bucket is blowing.

But this Kroger doesn't seem to carry most of the best bubble kablammoins' gums we remember from our youth. This seems odd, considering shoppers there regularly bubble with extreme dispatch. For all the bubbleness of most brands of gum, many folks are conscious of the difference it makes when gum is classed as *bubble* gum. When I was 10, I was on a family trip at a lake near Chillicothe, Ohio, and we went into a food mart where some woman skeeped at her kids because they were trying to buy bubble gum instead of just plain old gum. I don't understand why it mattered to her, but maybe she was afraid her kids would bubble and float away.



Respect the gum.

## CPH denied me medical care

Sue me, CPH. What I'm saying here is true, so you have no plunger to stand on.

As you know, around the time I turned 17, I was unconstitutionally locked up at a gulag known as Children's Psychiatric Hospital of Northern Kentucky—now NorthKey—because I was expelled from a Catholic high school and because I disagreed with the George H.W. Bush reich. No court hearing, no due process, no nothing. Once I got there, the guards gloated that CPH had judges on their side, so I decided I better not try to file any paperwork to get out. Keep in mind that I'm reasonably sane—especially compared to some of the cretins I went to high school with, who did things like drink out of a Coke can they found in a urinal.

CPH denied me medical care. Indeed they did.

On occasion, we were required to play baseball. Many kids would enjoy that—especially since this was the year our Cincinnati Reds swept the World Series (where Billy Hatcher repeatedly bubbled). But at CPH, baseball was only to be played by CPH rules. For starts, if we hit a home run into the woods, we would be declared out, because the guards assumed we hit the ball into the woods just so kids would search for the ball there and have a chance to run away. Also, I cannot bat. I don't have the coordination for it. Each time I struck out, the guards screamed at me that I threw the game on purpose.

I played outfield too, and I was so weak I could barely stand up. I had to crouch down. I was *that* weak. This was caused by the malnutrition induced by the shitty food there, and the forced druggings that took place there. Much of the food was outright inedible (and we were yelled at for not eating it), and my shrink there—after prescribing a strong psychotropic drug—even told my parents, “Watch for sedative effects.” I had a terrible time staying awake during “wakey-wakey” hours (not just when we were deprived of sleep as a punishment, because our cells were too cold, or because the guards shined flashlights at us).

The guards had to have noticed I was too weak to stand. So why didn't they send me to a doctor for it?

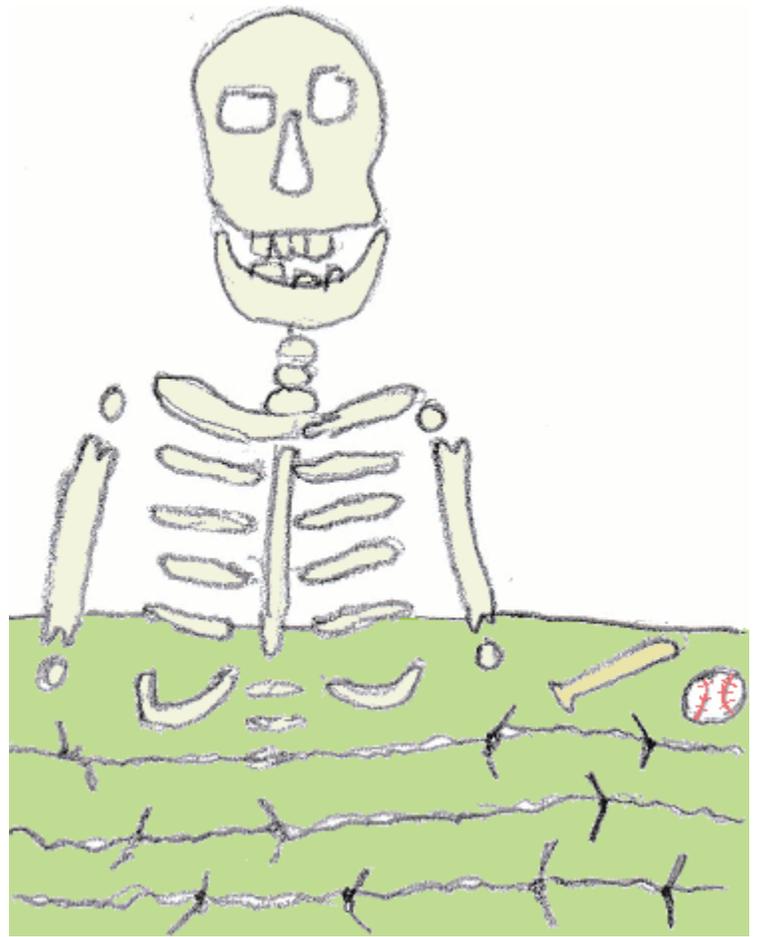
I was denied dental attention too. I am meticulous about dental hygiene (aesthetics aside), and my parents would take me to my regular dentist for checkups. During the 4 months I was tortured at CPH, I missed my dental checkup. On the other hand, that might be a good thing: Given CPH's penchant for quackery, they probably would have taken me to a quack dentist who'd pull all your teeth as a punishment for daring to complain about CPH. If they'd taken me to my real dentist, I'd have to explain to him why I was surrounded by guards.

Despite the lack of basic care, CPH said I had disorders I didn't have in order to justify medical visits I didn't need. It might have been an insurance scam. It's a fact that CPH committed insurance fraud by keeping me locked up and getting my parents' junk insurer to pay for it. I've seen the insurer letters, which are a smoking gun. If these unnecessary doctor visits were not an insurance scam, then they were just another means of control by CPH—which is equally likely. They said I had scoliosis—but I didn't. They took me to some doctor I'd never heard of at least twice for it—but I didn't need to go. I was manhandled by the medical staff there and forced to strip. Plus, if you don't have scoliosis, why get treated for it?

Not only did CPH force me to see this quack without my permission, but they didn't get my parents' permission either. Even if you're some right-wing crackpot who argues I wasn't protected by the mature minor doctrine only a year before I turned 18, CPH was clearly wrong by not consulting my parents. In addition, I don't remember being told what the doctor visits were for until I was on the examining table.

They tried to prescribe a very powerful acne drug called Accutane that I didn't want. *Everyone* has acne when they're 17, but I didn't want Accutane because I'd heard of it before and knew it was dangerous. In fact, Accutane was discontinued in 2009 after its maker was sued because it caused severe side effects. CPH also prescribed an acne soap I refused to use because it smelled like shit.

Given CPH's perfect record of failure and getting everything completely backwards, it seemed pretty safe not to cooperate with any major medical treatments mandated by doctors chosen by CPH. Yes, I know, it's that



“bad attitude” again!

Nobody fought for me. Every fight had to be fought by me alone.

CPH was full of Allowed Clouds, so—predictably—this psychiatric prison used bogus medical justifications to lapse into Allowed Cloud mode. The guards singled out some kids—who weren’t even particularly heavyset—and weight-shamed them by not letting them get seconds at meals. In other words, they starved them. They made a big show out of it in front of other kids. CPH starved all of us anyway by serving such disgusting food.

I will discuss it 27 years after the fact, because I’m an American and I have freedom of speech. If you don’t like it, fuck you.

All of this really happened. In America. In my lifetime.

## Yellow Water Canyon

It’s taken 30 years for me to hone the wit I lost when I was forced to attend the vile St. Joe’s.

When I was about 12, I had a lot more creativity. Take wetting your pants, for example. By that age, of course, I’d long since outgrown this dastardly deed, but I was still pretty good at pissed pants jokes.

The big fad at the time was water rides at amusement parks. I don’t like them, but some people thought they were just the bee’s knees. We were working-class people, so we didn’t visit Kings Island every year like everyone expected us to do. But this was around the time Kings Island opened its ostentatious and feared White Water Canyon ride—which drenched all attendees. I had absolutely no desire to ride the White Water Canyon, but I guess my folks were enticed by the radio commercial where the guy rode it “because it’s there”—which makes about as much sense as “because it bips.”

Considering the era this was in, it’s easy to get the image of a person riding this ride and getting their dungarees absolutely soaked as their big ‘80s hairdo frizzes even bigger from the moisture. I just wanted to stay as far away from this ride as possible because I don’t like getting wet in regular clothes.

So I came up with a funny joke to justify not riding it. I declared that if I wanted wet clothes, I’d simply pee my pants.

But I didn’t pee my pants—because I was 12, and I didn’t want wet, stinky clothes. Maybe I should have, because it’s not like people listened. Getting my clothes wet is just not my idea of fun. Why pay to get into an amusement park just to be miserable? I beat my head against the wall about this.

Luckily, this was just a onetime incident. After I got expelled from Cline and started going to St. Joe’s, all I did was beat my head against the wall—until I graduated high school, even longer. Nobody listened. For years.

I believe 8<sup>th</sup> grade was the year that broke my spirit. I felt like a robot after that. The decline in my confidence was absolutely breathtaking. I pride myself in creativity, but sometimes, when I need a creative solution to a serious problem, I end up drawing a blank. I think it’s because St. Joe’s and Brossart smothered creativity. When schools rob creativity, think how much talent society misses out on. On the other hand, if this had happened *before* I was 12, I probably would have ruined a bad polo shirt instead of normal clothes at White Water Canyon.

## We only had one bathroom

Back in my day, if you had to use the bathroom at the same time a family member was monopolizing it, you were out of luck. Every fiber of your being had to be depleted to avoid dirty drawers.

We got laughed at for having such a tiny house. Our whole street got laughed at. A spoiled brat at Brossart boasted right to my face that my street was “the scummiest street in Campbell County.” As part of our unspoiled existence, our home had only one beethoom. We were awed by the house on *The Brady Bunch* having multiple tinkletoriums. We were even more awed when home expos came to town in which the public was invited to tour fall-apart mansions that were being built in new subdivisions. As the floors were draped with old



newspapers—causing the ink to rub off on the brand new carpeting—everyone oohed and aahed that the houses had more than one johnnypoooper. (What the crap is a “breakfast nook”?)

But the high life wasn’t for us. I can’t count how many times I ran down the hallway at home in an emergency only to find the bathroom door locked because someone was hogging it. Sometimes they’d stay in the bathroom for over a half-hour at a time. One day when I was about 6, I was playing in the front yard in the snow in heavy snow pants and winter gear, when I felt the urge to drop a deuce. I ran inside and—lo and behold—the bathroom was being hogged again. Imagine how hard it was to hold it in long enough for the bathroom to reopen and for me to remove my snow pants (which required taking off my boots as well).

Once when I was about 17, someone was hogging the bathroom for so long that I had to pee in the back yard next to the trash cans and crawlspace door.

When people monopolized the lav, it was always a barrel of laughs to stick your hand under the door. They got so mad!

It was enough to make you burst out laughing even while a huge bubble of gum surged from your lips. But my mom’s reaction to this bathroom banditry was outright uproarious. I remember one time she angrily observed, **“EVERYBODY ALWAYS ENDS UP GOING TO THE BATHROOM AT THE SAME TIME!!!”** She acted as if science didn’t lend itself to simultaneous bathroom usage. But it did. If more than one family member ate meals together, there was a very good chance of a toilet scheduling conflict. It should have been expected.

How should we have mitigated this hardship? I’m drawing a blank for a good answer, but it wasn’t something I thought about much except when the need arose. It’s like how I didn’t worry much about my huge elliptical mole until it got big enough for a relationship partner to accidentally scratch.

## A person ruined a newspaper in 8<sup>th</sup> grade

Someone defaced a newspaper in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and it had to do with (drum roll please) gum.

This is another story from the depressing annals of St. Joe’s. This was when we had English class in one of the downstairs classrooms—which had been the music room the previous year. As in other classes, people constantly acted up and threw things. This was the class where we created ginthrow—or however it’s spelled. This was a game where we kept playing catch with a copy of *Guinness Book Of World Records* during class until the book was in tatters and the pages flew all over the room.

Back then, John Franco was a legendary pitcher for the locally popular Cincinnati Reds. Even if I didn’t assure you in advance that gum would make an appearance in this story, you’d know where this is headed, because baseball players just love to bubble. When you watch a game on TV, and the camera is behind the pitcher’s mound, you can often see a pink oval growing from the batter’s mouth hundreds of feet in the distance. #itsgum. One day, in English class, there was a stack of newspapers on a table next to the teacher’s desk. It might have been just the sports section. The front of the newspaper featured a huge photo of Mr. Franco. And he was bubbling. He blew a bubble with pink bubble gum the size of his head. And it was a frontal view, so the bubble completely blocked his face.

This photo in the newspaper was crying out to be defaced. I don’t remember whether I did it or someone else did. Whoever did it grabbed a pen and drew a smiley face on Franco’s bubble. It was like the “Have a nice day” face Walmart uses.

Suffice it to say, that newspaper was ruined. I’m sure the teacher had planned on laminating it and saving it forever.

After this periodical had been defaced, another student grabbed it from the table and began reading it in class. This classmate was a spoiled brat, but at least he was entertaining this time. He held up the newspaper and lamented what a shitty day John Franco was having, considering someone drew on his bubble and all.



It’s sort of like the time I defaced a photo of Tom Selleck in the newspaper that was laying on our living room floor by drawing a cough drop on him—after the actor needed cough drops to soothe the respiratory irritation that befell him when he filmed a movie in Cincinnati. It’s also kind of like the time someone desecrated a Jewel poster at NKU by sticking an inflated wad of bubble gum on the singer’s face (which made it appear as if she was bubbling).

After the John Franco newspaper got ruined, the rest of the newspapers sitting on the table in the classroom got ru too. Someone knocked them all onto the floor, where kids did the moonwalk on them—shredding them to bits.

Yep. They were ru.

## Can you see your own nose?

I'm lucky I buyed sunglasses with vision-improving feats, because it corrects something that's starting to irritate me. I have a family member who hates these gafas, just because. Tough toilets.

I'm unusual in that I can regularly see my own nose in my field of vision. I always have. Some people can do this, but we're nowhere near a majority. *Until recently, I used to think almost everyone could do this!* But we're a proud few! It has one advantage, but only if you're a gummer: When you blow a bubble with bubble gum that bursts and sticks to your nose, you can see if you've removed all the filaments of burst beege without looking in a mirror.

On the lower corner of each side of my field of vision, I can see one side of my nose. It's transparent, but it takes up most of each lower quadrant. If I close one eye, I can see one side of my nose in one corner, but it's opaque. I remember how when I used to watch Casey Kasem's TV show, for example, it looked like so...



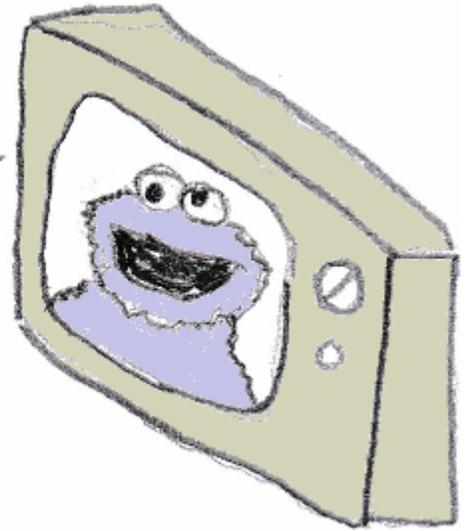
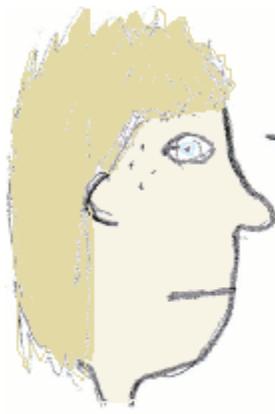
Life has always looked like that for me. Pretty splendid, huh? At least it used to be, before it became the opposite of not stupid.

Most people would be able to see their nose, except they don't have strabismus, so their brain shuts it out. I was shocked to discover that only 1 in 25 people has strabismus, but I'm one of the coolsters who gets to enjoy it. (Fun fact: 1 in 25 is also about how many whose lower front teeth touch the gums behind the upper teeth. So I'm not just cool. I'm *awesome!*)

Seeing my own nose never caused a problem, except lately it's gotten to be, because your eyesight shifts over time and my nose has taken up more of my field of vision. According to the Interbastes, I'm probably not a candidate for strabismus surgery, and besides that, it's not always effective. That means my family member who hates my bifocals is in for some rough years ahead, because I get to keep wearing them. Eyewear is the only clinical accessory I have—I think it's the only one I've ever had except a sling for a broken arm—and I get to rock it! And do I ever! In doing so, I'm fighting the system, and it's the greatest feeling in the world. A college schoolmate actually once asked me, "You wear contacts, right?" I never have. I have no idea why she thought I did.

Speaking of contacts, I have no eye contact whatsoever. Cool people call it "the gaze." I pay more attention to the lower half of a person's face, but until recently, I thought most people did. I've tried practicing eye contact with people I see in person or on TV, but I just don't see what the advantage of better eye contact is. I feel silly practicing eye contact with the Glenn Beck look-alike in the Columbia Hyundai commercials, the LoanMax elf, or a Sheena Easton record sleeve.

Believe me, my optical disorder is nowhere near as bad as other conditions I have, which are considered officially disabling. I guess some would consider it a disability, for someone in grade school told me that every human being alive is disabled to some extent. Nobody is perfect. But I don't think this alone would preclude me from more consistent employment (instead of having to rely on meager royalties). My other



disorders have done a decent job of that for much of my adult life. (I keep begging on Facebook for people to hire me for various jobs, but I've never gotten any serious replies.)

The few. The proud. The nose seers.

## The governor recommended gum

I was sitting on the floor in my home office jamming to some tunes recently, eyeing my bookshelf and the goodies that inhabit it. Then I noticed that snagging between two other books was my old Kentucky driver's manual. I grabbed it off the shelf and began paging through it, and it didn't fail to amuse.

The inside of the front cover is graced with a message from Gov. John Y. Brown Jr. The former Kentucky Fried Chicken investor was out of office before I was old enough to drive, but I have to assume he wrote the whole driver's manual all by himself, since there's no author listed. I used to have other versions of this booklet but this is the only one I can still find. (Also, I just love how Wikipedia blames Brown for Kentucky doubling its unemployment rate, when actually it was Reagan's fault.)

The gov apparently wanted motorists in our state to chomp beegie. I noticed on a King Don-smear page 65 that there's a set of bullet points about alertness. What's one of the recommendations for motorists keeping alert and awake? "Try chewing gum or singing along with the radio," the book suggests.

**HOLY SHIT, THE GOVERNOR OF KENTUCKY TOLD PEOPLE TO CHEW GUM!!!!!!!!!!!!** Or—if it wasn't Brown who personally wrote the driver's manual—he at least put his stamp of approval on bubble gum bustin' by penning the message inside the cover.

I'm trying to think of songs that were big on pop radio during the Brown administration that the gov might sing along to. The perfect song that fits his suggestion might be "Never Be The Same" by Christopher Cross, for I remember people likening the rhythm of the song to the sound of bubble gum poppage. I can just picture John Y. Brown driving to his office in Frankfort each morning, listening to his car radio, chewing bubble gum, and singing, "It was good for me...Pop!...It was good for you...Pop!..."

Best all, the driver's manual uses the *Sesame Street* font for the blue headers.

Sometimes it pays to be a hoarder. That way, I still get to comment on state-issued publications from 30 years ago that I've stockpiled for no practical reason.