

# The Last Word™

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## Speak & Spell gets third chance after lost part resurfaces

I lost a part from my prized Texas Instruments Speak & Spell well over 35 years ago, and I finally found it while sorting through documents at my mom's house just a few weeks ago. No sooner did I find it than my beloved Speak & Spell opted to speak and spell no more.

Usually, when something is lost, it's never seen again. This Speak & Spell part is a rare exception.

A few other things that have been lost for decades that still haven't resurfaced...



- A puzzle book from the 1970s put out by Hi-C. Contrary to popular belief, it did not include a warning against chewing bubble gum with costly orthodontic work that was made into a paper airplane by an elementary school student.

- A small, colorful booklet sponsored by Crest toothpaste and *Guinness Book Of World Records* in which you could keep track of your own personal records—one of which was the biggest bubble you could blow with bubble gum. It's ironic that a brand of toothpaste would encourage people to masticate this sugary viand. The book had a drawing of a boy throwing a frisbee on the cover.

- The Krogie—my name for a small piece torn off from a cardboard pair of scissors used on a product display at the Kroger in Highland Heights circa 1986.

- A Holiday Inn directory we defaced.

- A Kentucky driver's manual from before I was old enough to drive.

- A state-issued road map of Ohio that I got on my 1996 Columbus trip—the same trip where a Band-Aid landed in a motel swimming pool and where a man spit a cigar into a creek and a turtle ate it.

- A magnifying glass with a useful bifocal lens. I threw in the towel on ever finding it and got a new one years ago.

With my precious Speak & Spell seeming to take its last gasp, it appeared to be the final chapter in the 38-year-long saga of this device. Ever since I acquired it after my teacher encouraged my parents to buy one for me, Speak & Spell and I have shared lots of fond memories together. I remember one day, we were accidentally locked out of the house, and this educational toy kept me occupied until the police arrived to pick the lock. Remember that, Speaky? Wasn't that fun? I'll never forget the night my parents' Horizon broke down on a family trip, and how Speak & Spell kept us company as we were stranded at a Boron station until late at night. Remember, Speaky?

My parents placed a premium on education, so they put a lot of trust and money into this electronic toy. (If they cared so much about education, why did they send me to Cline? Because the other option was St. Joe's!) For working-class families like us, education was supposed to be a one-way ticket out of the drudgery we were sure to face otherwise (not like it ultimately did me any good, thanks to the greed of the 1%). When I got too old

for my Speak & Spell's primary function—spelling quizzes—the device helped encourage my interest in computer programming. Without the interest sparked by Speak & Spell, I might not have been able to write a FreeBASIC program that uses elevation contour shapefiles to calculate the elevation of every street intersection in greater Cincinnati.

I'm sure there were tears over the recent sad turn of events. Arrangements were pending for a proper and dignified disposal of my poor little Speak & Spell. But then this classic toy got a new lease on life when we discovered that it still works if you install one of the batteries so half of it is hanging out of the compartment—since the batteries it takes are about one-eighth of an inch bigger than they were in 1979.

My Speak & Spell wasn't dead. It was just poeing.

This device is now on its third life—proving once again that electronics in my day had better quality. My cellphone that I spent \$25 on in 2010 lasted only 6 years, but my Speak & Spell has lasted for 38.

## Pop goes the movies

My business partner who always critiques this zine has another funny story, so hang on to your face!

She disrupted a movie on a school outing and thought it was funny. No, she didn't bubble, so I'm sorry to disappoint you. Her memory has come alive to surmise that the film was a reward for her 8<sup>th</sup> grade class—over a quarter-century ago.

Her class was shuffled off to see a movie at a theater. She chose an aisle seat in one of the back rows next to a friend of hers. See, in a free society, we get choices on things whenever practical. This choice should have aroused suspicion, because why would someone pick a seat where their view might be blocked by moviegoers in tall hats like in the old Ernie and Bert skit?

This story came to light recently when I bought bland microwaveable popcorn so we could enjoy a bowl of it together. I once heard that Cincinnati TV personality Al Lewis—of *Uncle Al* fame—released a line of gourmet popcorn that included a bubble gum flavor, but I've never seen it in stores. Anybip, my friend says that when she went to this movie in 8<sup>th</sup> grade all those years ago, she and her pal got popcorn to devour during the film.

That's when the yummy fun began.

The movie itself was about as exciting as watching shit dry. She doesn't remember what it was called, but she says it didn't have much of a plot or dialogue. Apparently, it was a mainstream release. That—along with the discovery of unpopped popcorn kernels—got the mischief rating up in a big way. Zestaing with the popcorn helped too.

She kept trying to bite into the unpopped seeds, but it was rough on her peculiar pearlies. Her friend got a better idea. She had brought along a cigarette lighter. You can see where this is going.

So they lit the lighter and tossed an unpopped kernel onto the flame.

Pwoof! Kablammo!

The duo burst out laughing that they had interrupted the picture show by popping popcorn. Then came the usher. Not Usher, but the usher. The usher was a girl who was about the same age as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade class was. It sounds like the theater was violating child labor laws by hiring a 13-year-old to work during school hours. In any event, the young usher stomped down the aisle with a flashlight and ejected the pair.

A few minutes later, the teacher led the rest of the class out of the theater to join them. She angrily confronted the duo in the parking lot and said, "If it isn't the popcorn pals!" Evidently, the entire class got kicked out of the movie because of the disruption. Nobody except the teacher seemed upset by this. And she was *mad*! She scowled as she



lectured the popcorn poppin' pupils.

The pair of popcorn poppers just denied the whole thing. "It wasn't me," they each said. With no solid proof, the school couldn't punish them. Since popcorn clearly got popped during the flick, why didn't the teacher investigate how it happened? There had to have been a heat source of some sort.

With no penalty looming, the teacher just took the class to lunch at a restaurant and got ice cream after it. But she had a dour look on her face for the rest of the day. She must have figured there was a remote chance the popcorn popped by itself, but she knew that probably wasn't the case.

In later years, schools would have *called the police*, because schools today overreact to everything. They gotta fill that school-to-CPH-to-prison-to-CPH-to-prison pipeline, don't ya know. The only exception to this rule is that schools have grown more tolerant of harassment, even though it's actually a *crime*. This proves the "zero tolerance" Nazis are every bit the scumbags you suspected.

To make the day complete, some boy farted out loud on the school bus on the way back to the school. The teacher fell into a tirade about it.

It's unknown, however, whether anyone on this outing bubbled. Someone probably did, because everyone did in those days, thereby pulling one over on Team Tyranny.

## Big Lots customer is gonna bubble big

As Spirograph use and Operation KroGum continue unabated, our consumer reports bureau continues its popular investigation into gum availability at various retailers. It's news you can use!

The friendly neighborhood Big Lots sells beegee. I was buying some goodies there recently and perused their bubble gum selection near the checkout. At first, it appeared to be no better than Kroger—even worse, if you can believe that. But then, I noticed that a burly man at the checkout was buying this zesty confection. He plunked down 3 big boxes of Bazooka on the counter. He must have found it in an obscure part of the store. Not just 3 pieces or 3 packs—but 3 whole *boxes*!

I guess he was a bubble bustin' peep.

How can you chew that much bubble gum before it goes stale, unless you chew *gigantic* wads of the stuff? A family member of mine observed that the man probably has a family, and they were all gonna dig into the Bazooka and "chew it and blow bubbles." Obviously *somebody* will. I'm under no illusions that people won't bubble with it. If you're hoping against all hope that they won't, you're out of luck. That's why beegee was invented.

## Some idiot doesn't understand chess

I'm no chess genius, but at least I know what chess is.

Yet some idiot on the Internet doesn't. They think the object of chess is to see who can get all their pieces to the opposite side of the board first. That's a fascinating observation, because every time I played, I thought the object was to checkmate my opponent. Silly me!

We had an utterly kick-ass chess set when I was growing up. It had pieces made of plastic that were designed by sculptor and rubber duckie inventor Peter Ganine. Most chess sets don't have faces on the pieces, but you might call this set the "Yosemite Sam set." Here's part of a photo that my mom recently took of some pieces in our set...



You'll also notice that the pieces are not wearing glasses, because their heads are too skinny for regular specs. They may benefit from bifocals. I also had an old record of "Begin The Beguine" by Ray Conniff (which I still have), and I always had the image that the pieces in this set were singing the vocals.

These pieces had a patch of felt on the bottom to keep from tearing up the board. But I called one of the pawns the "naked pawn" because its felt had fallen off. I also coined the term *bother*, which was when any of your pieces crossed the crease halfway across the board.

We might not be Garry Kasparov, but trust me, my folks knew enough about chess not to confuse it with Candy Land. Back when I was about 5 or 6, my brother borrowed a book from the library about the game. He then challenged my mom to a game of chess, and wrote down the moves using standard notation on a paper grocery bag. As they were playing chess on the floor of the den, disaster struck. The "official" story is that I dove off a chair and crashed into the board, scattering the pieces everywhere. But what actually happened is that my mom was reading a book while playing this game, and accidentally dropped the book on the board. This move was recorded as, "Game ruined." (The magic word!) Uh, couldn't the game be redone since all the moves were written down?

I don't know why this chess set was branded as Gothic. Maybe it's like how in shop class in middle school, we used single-stroke gothic lettering, which was all capitals because "the Goths had no lowercase"—a statement that made no sense at all. Or maybe it's like how someone once referred to my website as a "whining goth" site because it used a black background. That was around the same time somebody wrote me an e-mail calling me a "redneck" who hates the United States. I never knew I was a "goth redneck."

The summer I turned 6, when I took a special class up at NKU, we were once assigned to make chess pieces out of plaster using plastic molds. An older boy in that class was accused of breaking one of the molds—ruining it beyond redemption. This was the same kid who once got skeeped at for bubbling in that class. In fact, he spent that whole day discussing bubble gum. The first thing he did when he got to class that morning was warn the rest of us about Dubble Bubble's tendency to produce huge bubbles that burst and stuck to one's face. That's news you can use!

With someone on the Internet being dumb enough to insist chess is nothing but Drive Yourself Crazy without the motor, maybe it's time for some innovations in this centuries-old strategy game. I've always thought it would be neat to have a piece called the "rook after all", which was disguised as a mere pawn but could suddenly zoom across the board to reveal its true identity. Upon using this piece to unexpectedly capture your opponent's pieces, you could declare, "Sorry, I had a rook after all!" It would also be nifty if the board had a couple of small lakes like Stratego.

That would be cool!



## A person bubbled with slime and thought it was funny

Remember a few months ago when I mentioned how people blew bubbles with stuff that isn't gum? I bet you tried it after I wrote that article!

YouTube has its share of bubble poppin' people. It's only natural that when YouTube was founded, folks would use it to post videos of themselves bubbling. But here's a YouTuber who doesn't use bubble gum. She uses slime instead...

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4vPsTd\\_6Cs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4vPsTd_6Cs)

That's right! She made slime and blew a bubble with it! Now, her product is not of the Slime brand of toy, but a generic slime that seems to mimic it. It's much like how when I was about 5, I used to go out in the back yard and make slop—which was really just mud in a cup, with perhaps a little bit of dog shit thrown in for good measure. But you couldn't bubble with it. About all we could do with it was pour it on the neighbors' mailboxes.

Anybip, the YouTuber in this video blows a bubble about twice the size of her head with her slime and lets it burst all over her face—not unlike beegee. Then she cracked up laughing.

It's the same sort of laugh you let out when you do something really disgusting—like the time when I was about 8 years old and some kid made a snorting sound and a column of mucus dangled out his nose, causing him to erupt in a helpless fit of heehawing.

After that clip was posted, some kids uploaded a video in which they flipped a huge sheet of slime in the



air like a jump rope or a layer of pizza dough, causing it to bubble a huge bubble...

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqRKwNGq\\_\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqRKwNGq__8)

The slime bubble burst all over the floor, creating a sticky 3-foot-wide gauntlet of goo that likely ruined the floor tiles.

## Scribble Scrabble

Scrabble can be a pibtastic board game when played properly. Sadly, most people won't play it properly.

Each turn is supposed to have a time limit. There doesn't seem to be anything in the official rules on this, but it's strongly implied. Some editions of the game even include a 3-minute timer. Because most folks won't use a time limit, a single turn of Scrabble will often consist of everyone staring lifelessly at their tiles for a half-hour. Occasionally, the silence will be interrupted by a loud clap of flatulence—and one of the other players angrily yelling, "Go to the bathroom!"

All too often, however, people have a way of turning what should be an exciting family game into an insufferable yawnfest.

Decades ago, a family member went through a brief stage in which their main goal in life was to acquire a Scrabble set that included a turntable allowing the board to rotate freely. This version of Scrabble would have had to cost a fortune. (I looked online, and some of these sets cost well over \$200 now.) We were working-class people, and *this* was supposed to be our big priority? We might as well have just purchased gold-framed eyeglasses or satin toilet paper.

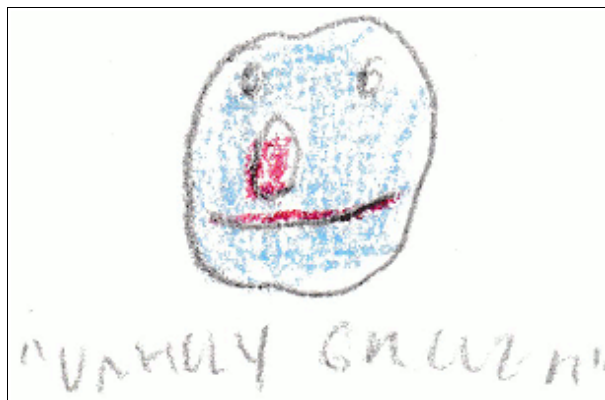
If you want to rotate the board, just move it by hand like everyone else does. You'll survive. Or poke a hole in it and put it on a record player. (But don't use the raised hub for 45's, because each side of the board will slope down from the crease in the middle, and the tiles will slide off.)

In my day, my grandfather built a Lazy Susan serving tray out of an old hubcap. It was quite impressive. This homespun technology might be a good substitute for buying a luxury Scrabble set with a turntable. I'd love to see how fast you can spin the board without the tiles flying everywhere.



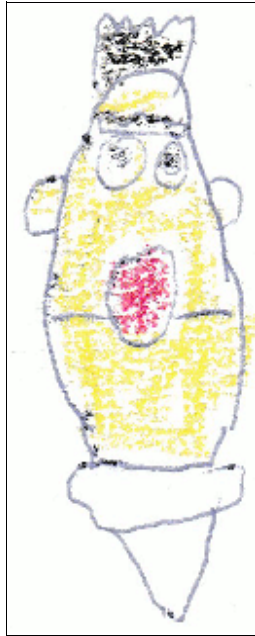
## An unholy mess on the Ses

Now, for a change of pace from the stories about passing gas, broken eyeglasses, bubble gum, Brossart, and punk rocker teeth...



That's a drawing I made of Grover from *Sesame Street* when I was about 10, which I labeled "Unholy Grover."

There's more where that came from...



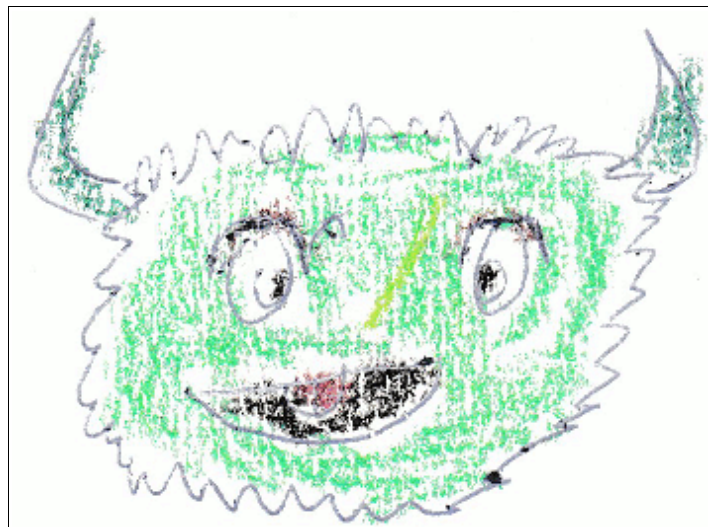
That's "Unholy Bert."

What's the story behind these faded crayon drawings of lovable *Sesame Street* Muppets?

A few weeks ago, I went to my mom's place to pick up some old items from my youth. I found several small pieces of paper related to a version of *Dungeons & Dragons* in which we slew *Sesame Street* characters who took an undead form. Another family member wrote data about each character on one side of the sheet, and I drew a picture on the other. We were so mature! The data for each was virtually identical. For instance, most were born on January 1, 1969, and died on April 1, 1983. We called these pieces of paper "hell cards."

It rains a lot here.

We also had "hell cards" of Ernie, Cookie Monster, Mr. Hooper, Roosevelt Franklin, Herry Monster, and of course this guy...



The ol' Osk wasn't "Unholy Oscar." He was "Oscar from Hell!"

(Also, the Wikipedia article on Roosevelt Franklin says, "Not to be confused with Franklin Roosevelt." Gee, thanks for clearing that up.)

Maybe someday *Sesame Street* "hell cards" will be as popular as baseball cards. Collect 'em all!

## Blame Michael Powell (a blast from the past)

Here's an oldie but a goodie from the bubble gum bustin' year 2001.

I was almost deprived of years of joy all because some right-wing crybaby couldn't handle anyone having an opinion different from their own. It all started when someone founded an Internet message forum about Cincinnati radio—one of my favorite topics at the time, though not anymore, since the “deregulation” thought police has robbed the magic from this once-great medium. If I remember correctly, the forum was stymied by technical woes, and users were scrambling to find a better website for such a board.

I obliged by starting one myself, and users of the previous message board flocked to mine. Not unjustifiably, I immediately used the new forum to criticize FCC head honcho Michael Powell's attempts to further loosen radio station ownership limits. That's not to mention the fact that Powell was appointed FCC chair by dictator Bush, and—like Donald Trump—Bush was a criminal who stole the election. You don't get to appoint people when you're not a legitimate President.

I was met with a lengthy, whiny response by an offended right-winger, who vowed to shut down my forum.

The forum did get shut down shortly thereafter because of this little wuss. But not before I received friendly responses to my posts. However, I came within *minutes* of not getting those gracious replies at all—because no sooner did I receive them than the forum was closed. If the complaint against me had been acted upon only a few minutes earlier, my posts never would have been seen by a friendly respondent—and vice versa—and today I'd be stuck in a world that's a lot less fun.

In other words, a right-wing economic royalist came within only a few minutes of keeping me from enjoying a positive relationship that has decorated life for the past 16 years—on an on-and-off basis. This shows that rightists aren't just wrong. They're dangerous. Their attempts to suppress dissent have a real negative impact on innocent people far beyond the suppression itself.

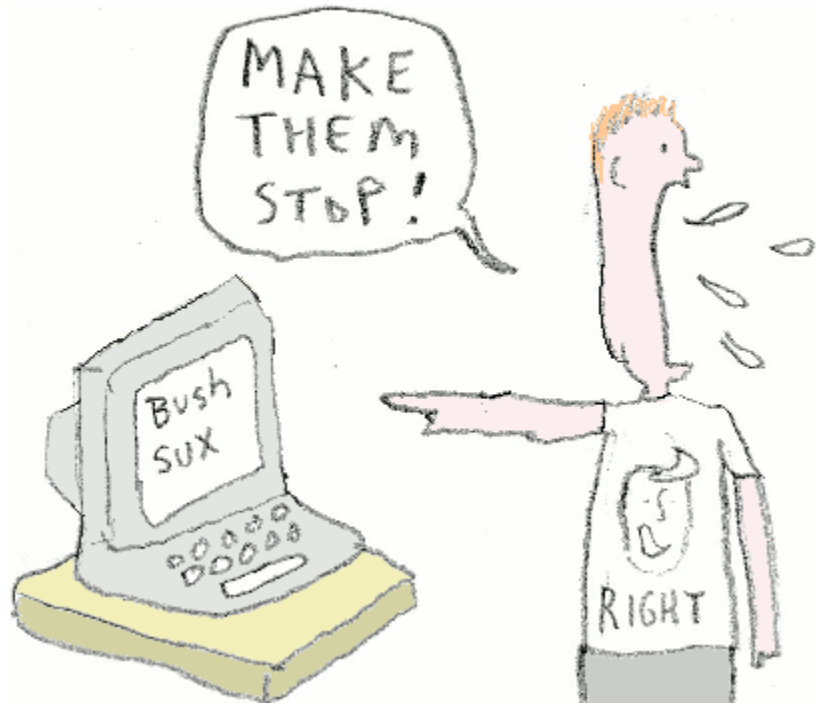
It's also yet another reason why right-wing extremism needs to be shunned and marginalized, and why our public officials must sponsor efforts to accomplish this goal. I dodged a bullet. Other innocents probably haven't been so lucky.

When safe spaces were becoming popular, the right-wing media bashed them by claiming they showed that those on the left couldn't handle ideas from the right. However, our whole society—especially the Internet in the early 2000s—had become a safe space for those on the right who *absolutely could not tolerate* any idea, person, or object representing the left. Worse, they'll ruin relationships over it.

After my forum was shut down, somebody—I don't think it was me—used the same website to start an Indianapolis radio board. This forum was invaded by the same ultraconservative crybaby who ruined my board—who posted the same complaint as on my board almost verbatim—and it too was shut down. I don't think I even posted anything controversial enough to elicit a complaint. All it took was for this person to notice I was there and moan that I should have been permanently banned from any forum on that website, and that any board that didn't ban me sight unseen should be closed down.

These experiences also led me to launch what became the most successful version of the People's Forum so far. This version was different from earlier incarnations that were full of alt-right harassment, or a later version that didn't have much other than a guy talking about how he claimed to have seen a local restaurant serve potato pancakes that the cook had dropped on the floor.

Now you know the story of how an apologist for a rogue FCC chairman almost destroyed a healthy relationship before it even started.



## I “mortgaged” a ‘Sesame Street’ pennant

This is a mortgage you can't get from Fifth Third!

When I was about 4, we utterly goed to the “Holiday on Ice” show that featured the *Sesame Street* kick-ass crew. We picked up a pennant there that had drawings of the *Sesame* gang grinning their asses off. It had Big Bird, Grover, and other adorable Muppet residents of our favorite alley.

Best all, it had Oscar the Grouch. Oscar being Oscar, he wasn't smiling like some of the other Sessers were. Rather, the ol' Osk rocked a terrifying scowl.

We hung the pennant on the wall above my bed. Oscar was always my favorite *Sesame Street* character, but I was horrified at his beastly glare. So I "mortgaged" the pennant. That means I somehow taped it up so it was perpendicular to the wall, so I didn't have to see it. I called it "mortgaging" because in the board game Easy Money, you'd mortgage your houses by flipping them up on their side. We also had a house rule for Easy Money that said that if a player threw a tantrum and banged their fist on their board, and any of their houses flipped up on their side, those houses would be considered mortgaged and they'd have to pay it off.

How did I "mortgage" my *Sesame Street* pennant, dare you ask? In this hilarious video, I describe how I engaged in this act of childhood poologgery...



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJU1UQh7D4I&t=29s>

My mom thought I was weird because I still avidly viewed *Sesame Street* when I was 5. Righto, Mom. I was only 5. In the United States. In the late '70s. Any American 5-year-old at the time was likely to be a diehard Sesamoid. Expecting me to not watch *Sesame Street* when I was 5 would have been like expecting me to like Brossart when I was 15 (or any age).

## Now I know why the Road Ruiner was free

Five bicycles in 16 years. One was stolen, one wore out, one I still have after 13 years, and each of the other two have been more of a hassle than all the rest put together. The dependable Peace Bike—the one that's held up since 2004—is the only one I've never had major problems with.

As you know, in January, I bought an electric bike and dubbed it the Road Ruiner. I actually got it for free, because the seller on Amazon wouldn't cooperate with replacing defective parts—though I did have to pay for the resulting repairs. Later, in May, the brakes went bad during the same outing as the celebrated Park Hills Police encounter. Suspiciously, both the front and rear brakes went out at the same time, which means someone probably tampered with them. I recall Bush's thugs tampering with the Extremist, so why wouldn't Trump's cultists do the same? After that, I discovered what appeared to be a design flaw of the pants crappingest variety: There seemed to be no way to remove the rear tire lest I got a flat. The axle appeared to be welded to the frame.

If I'd known about this apparent flaw before I purchased the bike, it would have been a deal breaker, because I don't want to be stranded 10 miles out of town with a flat. So—acting on impulse—I went on Craigslist to sell the Road Ruiner. Frankly, I was never that impressed with this bike, and I was going to effectively trade it in by ordering a different make and model of electric bike online. I found one that was cheaper—which wasn't available yet back when I got the Ruiner. I'd be reluctant to buy a more expensive bike *even if I could afford it*, because I have pride in being a working-class fella, not some fancy-pants yuppie.

I was sorely disappointed with this new bike when it arrived. First of all, it wasn't even the same model that was pictured. It didn't even have the same features: The photo showed that the wheels had a convenient quick release lever, but the hulking velocipede that arrived didn't have this. This bike also had at least 4 defective parts—one of which was the seat, which fell off the first time I rode it, almost making me late for an appointment at the bubble gum doctor. Meanwhile, I thought I fixed the brakes on the Ruiner, but they broke again that night when I was at a gathering way up in Corryville. Imagine if you can riding an electric bike *with no brakes* from Corryville all the way to Bellevue—at night, no less. It's downhill—way downhill—for several miles. I actually had to call for help from a friend.

Around this time, a family member discovered that the wheel of the Ruiner could be removed after all. I don't know how they figured it out. The instruction manual isn't worth shit, and it doesn't say how. I guess the maker of this bike expects everyone to be a mind reader and figure it out themselves. Older versions of this bike apparently had a nut for taking off the wheel that you could see right away, but this one didn't. If I'd known how to remove the wheel, I wouldn't have tried to sell the bike. Now it was too late, because I already had the replacement bike.

Meanwhile—there's enough meanwhiles in this story for *Everyone Poops*—I got at least 2 offers to buy the Road Ruiner that were scams. I found an article about one of these scams from back in 2014—but nothing was being done about this scam after 3 years. I got at least as many scam offers as real offers—which makes me ask



what Craigslist is doing about all the scams. A legitimate customer did bop on by to check out the Ruiner, but he realized it was shoddy, so he didn't buy it. I had to be honest with him about it.

As for the Road Ruiner's replacement, a family member agreed the seat was unusable—so there's that. I could have replaced the seat, but here's another deal breaker: In order to remove the battery for recharging—which you're supposed to do after each use—you have to remove the seat. What idiot designed this? A dumb one?

The seller had me return the whole bike because of the many defective parts, and refunded me for it. However, I did have to squander over \$20 for a new box, since I couldn't use the mutilated box it arrived in. I then decided to keep the Road Ruiner—even though its maker has apparently gone out of business, since their website seems to be down for good.

Look at how much aggravation the declining quality of bikes lately has caused. It's like the problems I was having with stereos in the '90s. Or how people on the Internet say "I've had my fill" of the decline of the bubble blowing properties of bubble gum. (I'm commissioning an expert to test that thesis.)

I'm one disillusioned guy. A lot of hassle and stress could have been saved if the instruction manual for the Road Ruiner was worth a damn. Trust me, it isn't. You'd have to see it for yourself. Even most of the photos in it are just a blur. The poor workmanship of both electric bikes in this story is hampering the entire industry. Northern Kentucky should be teeming with electric bicycles primarily for these reasons...

- **The area has terrain problems, which limits the reach of a regular bike. (I used QGIS and the government's elevation contour shapefiles to determine that my arthritic bod is now usually limited to below 600 feet elevation on a regular bike, which is about where the Monmouth Street underpass is.)**

- **The state won't ban car insurers from charging confiscatory rates—though their product is mandatory to own a car.**

- **Public officials *maliciously* put up other legal obstacles to keep some of us from even getting a car in the first place—which gives an unfair advantage to those who have enjoyed a whole lifetime of unfair advantages.**

- **Local retailers usually locate as far from populated areas as possible—or they locate near those who are privileged enough to have a car.**

It's like living in a command state where the government rations cars and decides who can have what. Life in this area is tough if you don't have money. Then they have the nerve to blame *us* for it! I'm an independent writer—*that's my job*—and I don't care to hear another harangue from some rich Nazi about how it's my fault I'm not rolling in dough. Despite all this, how many electric bikes do you ever see in northern Kentucky? I couldn't sell the Road Ruiner for *anything*. This seems like the perfect place to sell electric bikes, yet there's almost no interest, because of the industry's own fuck-ups. (Cool! My word processor knows the word *fuck-ups*!)

When I was about 13 or 14, relatives who were roughly my age seemed to all have little radios with headsets with booming bass, which they got from our elders. My radio croaked after the warranty expired, and my beloved elderberries didn't replace this defective radio. I never misused this device. It simply died. I felt left out at family events when I saw my relatives listening to their radios on their headphones, but I can appreciate why it was never replaced. It was just the luck of the draw that my radio was a lemon, and folks had better uses for their hard-earned money than to spend it on another radio that might also be defective. Their intentions were good. Losing the zip code lottery is much more serious—especially because our so-called elected officials act out of malice in their failure to remedy it.

The Road Ruiner lives—and so does my determination to continue challenging the bogus state law that forbids electric bikes.

## How people steal in postdemocratic America

I'm a funny guy, and I wish I could see the humor in this story like I do with everything else lately, but I can't. Not for the life of me.



The “tough on crime” talk that grabs headlines every now and then is another exercise in rich privilege. It comes from serial whiners and catatonic loudmouths. But these elites are only tough on *small* crimes that afflict *them*. They don’t give a shit about *big* crimes that victimize normal people like you and me.

It’s bad enough that a lot of corporate crime has been legalized outright. It’s bad enough that the so-called crime-fighting warriors have actually *blocked* efforts to extend the statute of limitations for prosecuting child molesters. It’s bad enough that NKU covers up rape. It’s bad enough that authorities didn’t do *one fucking thing* to go after the harassment and violence I suffered in middle and high school. But what I’m talking about here is a separate pattern of theft and break-ins that’s gone on for the past 25 years or so.

As a rule—and I can’t think of a single exception—right-wing elites believe in crueler punishments for smaller offenses, but milder punishments or no punishment at all for bigger crimes.

The self-styled crime fighters launched a coordinated letter-writing campaign supporting barbaric penalties for minor crimes—even against suspects who may have been innocent—only a couple years after their demigod George H.W. Bush pardoned traitors involved in the Iran-Contra affair, a scandal that dwarfed even Watergate. So their Mercedes convertible got paint on it from some vandal? Poor babies. I fume at how one of their excuses for their stance is that it occurred in a country that required car owners to buy a prohibitively costly insurance policy. So take that up with insurance companies that won’t lower the cost of insurance—and lawmakers who won’t require them to. Don’t take it out on the next person you see under the age of 40 who buys spray paint.

The ultimate barbarism may be the crimes they let go unpunished—just for the sheer hell of it.

I think the first crime in this series that I suffered was at NKU when someone pickpocketed my wallet with money in it. I’d let it slide if it went to someone who was truly needy, but it didn’t. It happened on the day that the school had a big jamboree in the University Center to indulge some rich students, and the billfold was lost when I had to squeeze through that crowd.

When I was 19, I moved out of my boyhood home and got my own apartment. I left behind a tiny box of rare coins because my mom said it might get stolen from my new place. We already knew by then that authorities around here didn’t always take crimes against people of limited means seriously, so we just assumed I wasn’t going to have protection from crime as long as I lived in one of the most inexpensive apartments in town. Lo and behold, the coins vanished from my mom’s house, and now she thinks they were stolen from there years ago.

The right-wing revolving door justice system struck again when someone broke into my apartment and stole my camera—that was almost brand new.

As the thefts of the camera and wallet went unsolved, I was confronted by police just walking home from Thriftway or using the library at NKU.

I was in my early twenties when an elementary school kid who lived in my building came to my door, overpowered me, and grabbed a Johnny Bench silver medallion from inside my apartment. I couldn’t stop him, because I was so weak at the time that I was often bedridden. He later said he lost the medallion—which I had won as a prize at a party. I understand he was too young to go to jail, but if the elder Bush hadn’t abused his pardon powers, the boy’s mom could have warned him beforehand that wrongdoing brings punishment even for people in high places. Presidents set examples, and American society tends to reflect each President’s character. The Bush pardons set a bad example for America’s young people.

Seven years ago, there was the series of home invasions at my current apartment, in which money was stolen—which continued even after I reported the break-ins to the police repeatedly.

About 2 years ago, somebody broke in and stole a fork in a plastic wrapper and a Speedway rewards card—possibly in 2 separate incidents. I also discovered someone had broken in and tried to escape out the window, where they dropped my ATM card. One day, I noticed rain leaking from the ceiling, and it turned out a hatch on the roof had somehow become open. It was attributed to the wind, but I have serious doubts.

This isn’t how we act in a civilized society. Can you imagine any of these crimes being tolerated in the Old West? Some of us think modern America is more civilized than other countries or past generations, but that’s not always true. America today manages to have both the world’s highest rate of imprisonment *and* highest rate of serious crime. That’s not what I call a mark of civilization. While the savagery of serious street crime goes unpunished, the Far Right feigns outrage at other countries’ alleged barbarism for daring to punish crime at all—even after they praised regimes that penalized less serious crimes more harshly. It must be horrifying to them that there’s actually societies out there that apply laws evenhandedly, without regard to privilege and wealth.

Once in a *great while*, justice prevails. According to the Campbell County Detention Center website, a drug dealer with the local Tea Party just got sentenced to 15 years in prison—though the conviction was ignored by the right-wing media. Some say that sentence might be too tough, but those saying that are usually silent when someone less opulent gets a longer sentence for mere possession. The Tea Party sells opiates, but they’re also the ones heartlessly saying we should just let addicts die.

Protection from serious crime helps form the line between civilization and barbarism.