

The Last Word™

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Mugged by reality

A few weeks ago, something got ru.

My mom conducted a gargantuan yard sale—quite possibly the biggest I’ve ever seen. She asked me to help out on both days. We sold books, lamps, appliances, furniture, board games, luggage, Ed Ames records, and other stockpiled goodies.

And of course mugs. I don’t know how my mom ended up with so many mugs. And they were valuable mugs. And fragile.

Yes, you can already see where this story is going.

When customers break stuff at a yard sale, they usually don’t wait until after they’ve paid for it. Most folks break it while it’s still on display—then hide the evidence. Once when I was about 8, we went to a garage sale—I think it was on Holly Woods Drive in Fort Thomas—and my brother pushed a toy wagon into a stack of flowerpots that were being sold there, and he blamed me for the broken pots. A woman in Texas says she ran a yard sale where a customer smashed an antique bowl on the pavement because she wouldn’t lower the price. The episode at my mom’s recent yard sale though was slightly different.

Among our very first customers on the first day of the sale was an older couple. The woman decided to buy every mug she could find and put them in several boxes that held about 12 each. Then, as she browsed other rooms, she asked me to sit in the living room for a half-hour to guard her priceless mugs.

Later, the couple was getting ready to pack all their purchases into their car, which they had parked at the beginning of the driveway. The man set 2 of those boxes full of mugs on the hood of their car. One box on top of the other. On a sloped hood. Parked on solid concrete.

Yes, it happened.

I was standing at the front door of the house doing yard sale business when I heard an incredible smash. No doubt about it, something got ru! Might it have been...*Ed Ames*?! Nope! I looked over towards the street and saw one of the boxes full of mugs capsized on the ground. Pieces of broken mugs were scattered around it. The cups had runneth over!

I saw it, but I couldn’t believe it.

Those mugs were (keek!) ruined. They couldn’t even be used as compost! All those mugs, wastage bastage! Plus the time I spent guarding them.

After this happened, the woman kept saying to the man that if she’d broken the mugs like this, she’d “never hear the end of it.”

There were only a few mugs that were a total loss. A few mugs in that box miraculously survived. But of those that were destroyed, O what mugs they were! They had clever sayings or designs—and now they were ru. Smashed to smithereens. That’s like if you fall face-first on the sidewalk and knock out only 2 teeth, but they were cool, crooked ones instead of boring, straight ones that you’d rather lose instead.

I didn’t actually notice what kind of car the couple had when I was sweeping up the mug detritus. I don’t know if they had the foreign car with a Donald Trump sticker I saw parked there later. That may have belonged to a man who showed up and launched a classist tirade about how he thinks people from Newport are lazy. He lamented people who painted his house and had the nerve to demand getting paid for it, and he complained about able-bodied people not working. Uh, this was a weekday during normal business hours, so it sounds like you just volunteered, mister!

On the second day of the sale, a woman bought some antique saucers with the stated intent of breaking them to make mosaics. The mug incident would have been a bonanza for her!

We also encountered our share of celebrity look-alikes at the yard sale! On the first day, a Telly Savalas



look-alike purchased an Elvis calendar. Savalas is best known as the actor who played the title character in the 1970s TV crime drama *Kojak*. He's also been credited with a windfall for the bubble gum industry. His character usually sucked on a lollipop, but in one episode, he chewed bubble gum—and he even bubbled! This encouraged *Kojak* fans to bubble frequently. On the second day of our sale, a youngster who strongly resembled Barron Trump showed up.

Best all, the toilet broke. Cool also.

So a certain right-wing high school wants a new stadium

And nobody here cares.

Nobody.

Watching stupid YouTube videos of a Matt Bevin look-alike playing with a Creepy Crawlers set is more interesting than the Bishop Brossart thought police is these days.

Facebook admits they're overrun by right-wing sockpuppets

In America, right-wing extremists post under fake Internet accounts.

In Russia...*right-wing extremists post under fake Internet accounts!*

By the early 2010s, it didn't take a genius to see that a significant percentage of the nastiest, most vitriolic far-right hate speech and fake news posted on Facebook was from sockpuppets. This was especially true on newspaper websites using Facebook as a commenting platform. It was also clear because the number of "likes" for Tea Party and other right-wing pages on Facebook seemed to grow exponentially despite cratering support elsewhere. The Far Right used sockpuppets even though they'd long accused every online account that disagrees with them of being a sockpuppet—even in the face of solid proof to the contrary.

Now—in a bombshell story that broke in early September—Facebook has finally admitted that their site is full of these phony accounts. At least it *should* be a bombshell story. The right-wing media forgot about it within days. It turns out that a Russian propaganda firm placed

right-wing ads on Facebook going back to 2015. Many of the ads had to do with the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. Facebook said this shadowy company purchased some \$100,000 in ads, and that the ads were traced to a troll farm in St. Petersburg, Russia.

I don't see how there's any way in hell Facebook didn't know ads were being purchased under fraudulent accounts. It was *so damn obvious!* They finally had to admit it because of Robert Mueller's probe into Russia's interference in the American "election." Investigators had already determined that Russia used paid trolls on social media to manipulate American opinion—and the obvious conclusion from there is that American right-wingers coordinated with them. Yet—while Facebook allowed right-wing sockpuppets for years—they censored and even deleted legitimate accounts for disagreeing with right-wing fascists.

For the record, it's illegal for foreign companies and individuals to spend money to influence American elections. Then again, interests in other foreign countries had already done so, which assisted Republican electoral strength in the '90s.

Facepoo also said they found another \$50,000 in ads purchased by accounts whose default language was Russian but whose IP addresses traced to the U.S.—which practically confirms coordination with America's Far Right.

With all the spite and vitriol it brings, why does any mainstream newspaper still use Facebook for its commenting platform? Right-wing sockpuppets don't do a damn thing to promote intelligent debate. I want smart, informed commentary. I associate with intelligent, mature, industrious people. I have 3½ years of college, and I have a right to expect smart debate and conversation. If I wanted to hear reactionary garbage, there were already plenty of other places to find it.

Regardless of whether it originates in the U.S. of A. or abroad, the kind of talk that has filled Facebook in recent years is un-American. It spreads racism, classism, and fear.



It truly is time for our legislators to open an investigation into Facebook hate speech. Facebook needs to be told to get its act together—or else face some regulation.

Democracy dies at the hands of right-wing trolls.

Saliva comes aliva

I used to be able to shoot out a narrow stream of saliva in a small arc.

People don't respect saliva like they used to. Recently, I saw an intelligent-looking woman pull a lollipop away from her mouth in public, and a strand of spit linked the candy to her lips. Funny? You bet! Awe-inspiring? Not so much, because even an idiot can do that—and probably has. It takes real planning to do what I used to do.

When I was an 18-year-old high school senior, I always had spitting contests with my schoolmates during class. One of the things we did was eject saliva in an arc. This wasn't boring old hawking and spitting. This was a stream of spit that appeared to come from under the tongue, with the lower jaw shifted forward. It's that face that Donald Trump always makes when he gets mad (i.e., all the time).

I don't know how we did it. I seem to recall that we had some candy that enabled us to do this. But we didn't bubble with this candy, because it wasn't gum.

Once, as a youngster, I accidentally shot out spit in an arc like this. It was during a routine dental checkup. The dentist must have nicked a gland while he was conducting a cleaning. Then he declared, "That's saliva—from the salivary glands!" Thanks for the news flash, Kermit.

Since high school, I haven't been able to do this. I don't think I've seen anyone else do it since then either. I have no recollection of how to do it.



Right-wing memes cost a local business a good worker

I won't work for free, but I've offered to work at local businesses—especially since I earned my GIS certificate. I have PTSD and associated health problems, and I think it's eminently reasonable to expect my employer to provide adequate support for me to work with this condition. Usually, when I post a work offer on Facebook, the local economic gatekeepers point out how nobody's going to hire me when they see my Facepoo profile photos with the crossed eye or the switchblade, but that's their loss.

And lo! Someone has now posted a notice from a local company seeking employees. I considered applying there, but first, I wanted to investigate to see if the firm's owners were even remotely reasonable folks. I try to investigate things before I commit to *any* major economic relationship. Trust me, I know from experience how important this is.

I'd let it slide if the worst thing they did was admit to voting for the wrong bozo. People can disagree with each other and not be ranting maniacs about it. Plus, I don't mind if an employer happens to be the churchgoing type. Rumor has it that the area does have a few cool churches—not just churches led by checkbook clergy who follow the Republican version of Jesus.

I looked at the Facebook timelines for a couple who appears to own and operate the business in question. I didn't like what I saw. One of them had posted a rant crying about how they thought they were being mocked by society because they follow the Republican brand of Christianity. This tirade didn't come right out and say it was that version of Christianity, but it was strongly implied. The Far Right has used this talking point for years, and I know to beware when I see it.

The other person had filled their Facebook page with a steady stream of far-right memes. Now, I'm all for a good dissertation against Hillary Clinton. America's future belongs to Bernie Sanders, Alan Grayson, and Elizabeth Warren—not Clinton. What I find suspect is the nonsense from the right that often accompanies criticism of Clinton. One of the most disgusting anti-Clinton memes posted on this Facepoo timeline says, "Show your support for Hilliary [sic] by doing the plastic bag challenge." It includes a photo of a person smothering themselves with a bag. Another canned meme on this timeline assails anyone who is "a Leftist, a Socialist, a Communist, a Progressive, a Marxist, a non-believer" or other supposed villain and declares, "My tolerance for anti-American BS has reached ZERO!"

The timeline doesn't get any better as you scroll down. This page lays the stupid on thick with the bigotry and discredited right-wing conspiracy theories.

Who'd want to work for someone like this? You don't get to complain about everybody else's supposed sloth and then create a hostile work environment that nobody wants to be a part of. If you're tired of others supposedly not working hard enough, look in the mirror and consider that maybe—just *maybe*—they're not the ones who need to mend their ways. If you can learn to hate, shouldn't you be able to learn to love?

After seeing all that hogwash, I didn't apply for a job at that business. (**"WHAT?!?!?! YOU**

DIDN'T?!?!?!" say our economic gatekeepers.) It's bad enough that we live in a broken society that treats workers as a mere commodity who must sell their work and are only permitted to do so when it boosts our overlords' profits—and then we see our earnings eaten up by companies that we must buy necessary goods and services from. What makes it worse is when the local business establishment spreads lies and hate.

That they've done for many years. They're not like the guiltily rich in more liberal areas. Our area's money class is made up of militant right-wingers. This experience also shows once again that it's not the working class but the ruling class that supports right-wing causes. You just don't see people like me who have limited economic means posting far-right memes on Facebook.

I guess it's society's fault for not mollicoddling the Far Right more when they were 12.

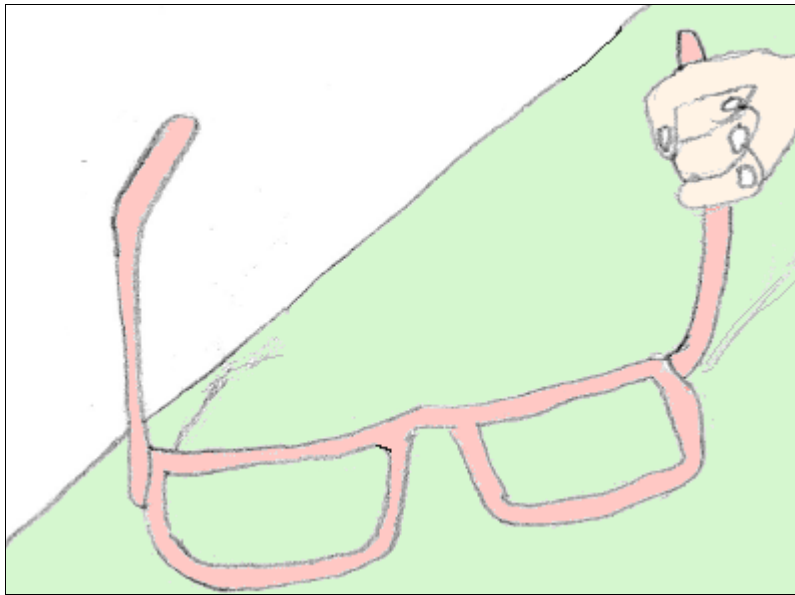
Experts agree on a good way to scratch your glasses

Do you wear eyeglasses? Perhaps you have a family member who wears them. You might wear them someday.

One hundred percent of everyone who has ever worn glasses has hated wearing them. So did you know you can scratch the lenses, angering those who are older but not wiser? Your elders seem to disagree on the best way to prevent this damage—but they seem to agree on a surefire way to scratch them. Offer not valid if you truly need glasses.

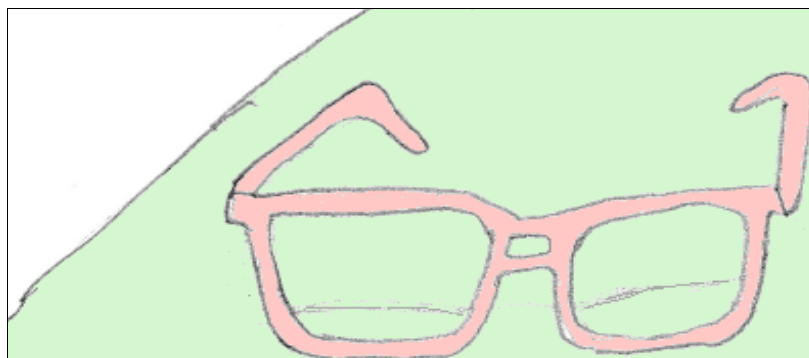
I gathered this info from interviewing famous spectacle wearers Robbie Rist and Sarah Palin. Just joking! Rather, I consulted NBCi.

How do you go about scratching your specs to kingdom come? According to the self-anointed experts, the surest way to do this is to lay them face-down on a hard surface like so...



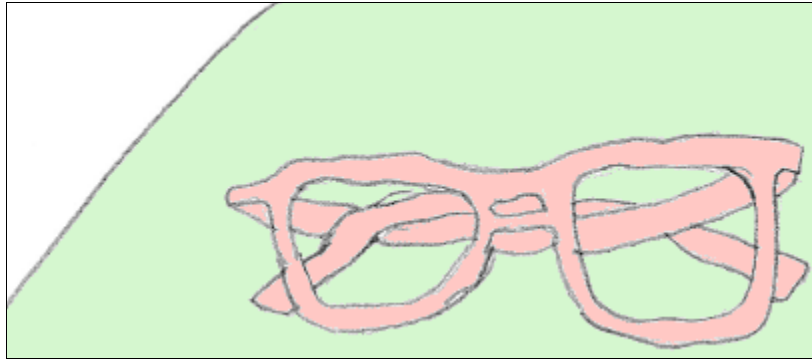
They *hate* it when you do this. So do it.

When you go to the eye doctor with a brother or sister, notice how your beloved sib does this with their expensive gafas as the doc is explaining how to wear them. The doctor will patiently try to correct this mishandling by setting the glasses face-forward like a conforming sheep...



When your sib gets their new glosses home, notice how they continue to place them face-down so the

lenses get scratched. Your parents will then angrily grab the specs and set them face-up with the arms folded...



Then the oldsters will make your beleaguered sibling pay for their scratched glasses out of their college fund.

Nonetheless, if you hate glasses as much as everyone else does, be sure to store them face-down so they get scratched. It will bring you fame and fortune as far as the eagle soars!

No revolution has ever been won by “good behavior.”

A person can't bubble because they split their tongue in two

A person split their tongue in two in America's lost decade!

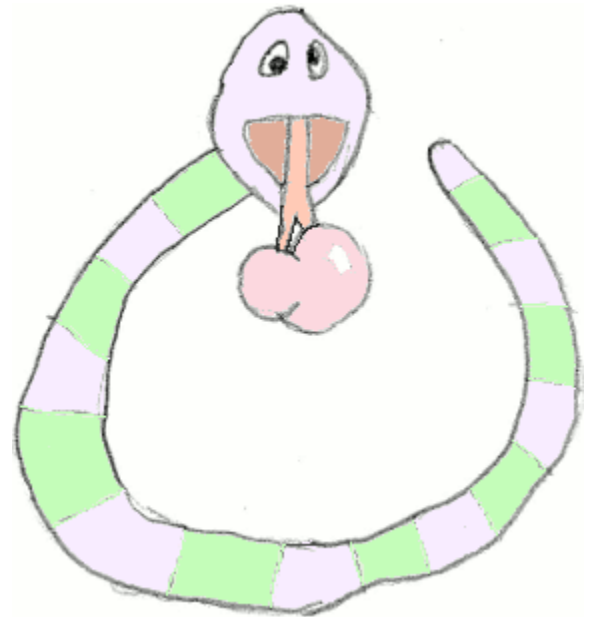
Lots of folks engage in body modification for the purpose of art or expression. Back in 2008, someone posted on the Intertubes that they had their tongue split—giving them a forked tongue. After having their tongue split, they observed, “I love my tongue ... but there is one problem.” Can you guess what that problem is?

You'll *never* guess!

They said the only problem with getting a forked tongue is that they can no longer blow bubbles with bubble gum. They said they “really used to enjoy that” and wondered whether anyone else had the same issue.

But lo! Some peeps replied that having their tongue split didn't hinder bubbling. Indeed, it only enhanced it! At least 3 people said that it enabled them to blow 2 bubbles at once—side by side! My term for this is a *Dallas/Fort Worth*. Look at a map to see why.

And you thought you and your teeth punker friends were the undisputed world champs at blowing irregularly shaped bubbles with gum!



A person ruined their cat eye glasses and thought it was funny

The '60s!

I wasn't born yet in the 1960s, but oldsters still talk about that turbulent decade. It was an era of cat eye glasses—which preceded the huge frames that ruled the roost in my day. According to legend, photography studios in the '60s added cat eye glasses to high school portraits without students' permission to make them appear stylish.

Cat eye glasses were called that because each lens tapered to a point at one of its upper corners—not unlike the peepers of a friendly feline.

And they were just as prone to ruinment as any other eyewear style. A woman posted on the Interpipes about how she was in elementary school back in the '60s and rocked cat eye specs. And one day, she inflicted severe damage on these glasses. Can you guess how?

Can you?

You will never, ever, *ever* guess how it happened. Not in a million years! Unless of course you've been reading this zine—in which case you know precisely where this story is headed.

You see, there's this stuff called bubble gum. It's called that because it's gum that you can blow big bubbles with. You chew it, and then you puff out these huge bubbles. If you wear glasses, you're probably not allowed to—because of the obvious risk—but admit it, you do it anyway.

Anybip, the cooltagonist in this story was on the playground at school one day, chomping a big square of beegee. Then she bubbled. Just like you do every day. She blew a bubble the size of her head!

Needless to say, it burst on her cat eye glasses. Why wouldn't it? She immediately peeled the gum off her spectacles and shoved it back into her mouth. No muss, no fuss!

She forgot about the day's bubble gum busting session until she got home. Then her mom noticed a thin strand of beegee hanging from the delicate gafas. This story's cooltagonist burst out laughing. She wasn't laughing for long, for she says this was one of few times she ever got spanked. But I'm sure the laughter resumed after the punishment was meted out—and hasn't subsided in 50 years.

As I was writing this piece, my business partner who critiques this zine bought reading glasses that have giant 1981-style frames so she can read small-print catalogs at work. I mentioned this in a chatroom, and someone forecast that "she might blow a bubble" and "it could bust all over her glasses, ruining them." That's part of the fun of bubbling! Why even chew gum if you don't take risks like this? Cool people enjoy the authenticity of risk.

Now you're going to insist eyeglasses aren't a real invention, all because someone reported that they blew a bubble with bubble gum that burst on them.



Pennies from heaven

This piece might as well be titled: "How Much Weight On Your Tone Arm Will Ruin Your Records?" It's news you can use—because, after all, everyone in 2017 still listens to vinyl.

Recently, I rescued a few old records that my mom threatened to throw away. When I started to dig into them, I noticed my turntable needed a new stylus—which I was able to order from a small music shop down the street.

Now, my turntable is about 12 years old, and after I got my new stylus, I listened to a few records that I already had, which I hadn't heard since before I got this turntable. A couple of these discs skipped mightily, but I couldn't find a single scratch on them, and they never skipped before.

That got me to successfully improvise a solution. I recalled that back in the early '90s, we were having the same problem, and we figured out it was caused by the tone arm being too lightweight. This led us to weight down the arm by fastening a penny to it with adhesive tape. So I tried it again this time, and it worked like a charm. But I used mounting putty instead of tape. I'm sure bubble gum would work just as well.

I don't recommend this unless you know exactly what you're doing. I considered the possibility that too much weight would prematurely wear down both the stylus and the records. I'm probably in the clear though. One website says that since 1982, American pennies have weighed 2.5 grams, which a popular record kerpowin' message board says is well within the recommended tracking force for a tone arm. In fact, someone on this board says that more weight actually reduces wear—up to a point—since styluses that are too lightweight cause mistracking. I'd get a second opinion on that though.

Similarly, my new stylus purports to be diamond, but I've worried for years that diamond styluses wear down records faster than ceramic styluses, since diamond is supposed to be the world's hardest substance. Then again, why did diamond styluses I had in the past wear down after only a few years? In other words, my best records are probably safe in that regard. I'll take the music store's word that it's a good stylus.

At least I bought this stylus at a local shop instead of ordering it off EBay. Someone on another message board says they got theirs off EBay, and it turned out to be not the stylus that was advertised. As is typical of Ebay—which does not stand behind its sales—EBay did not make their seller refund the cost to return the item, despite the EBay seller's false advertising.

The records I salvaged are mostly rock albums from the '70s and '80s, which aren't nearly as fragile as antique 78's. Someone on a record collecting blog expressed chagrin at ordering rare 78's and having them arrive in pieces because the seller didn't pack them properly. They said, "It's amazing these 78s have survived a century of world wars but once they fall in the wrong hands it's all over in a split second."

Are records gonna get ruined? If poo.

In a Stew

Who was this mysterious Stew character they talk about on *American Top 40* reruns from the 1980s?

I have a blast every Sunday night when WGRR airs these vintage *AT40* countdowns that were hosted by the late Casey Kasem. There's always songs about bubble gum. For example, a 1983 show included "Stand Back", which is what you say to everyone when you're about to blow a bubble. A 1986 episode contained "Throwing It All Away", which is what you do with a wad of beegee when you're done chomping it (except at Brossart). "Draw Of The Cards"—from a 1981 show—is about the randomness of which lens of your glasses a bubble will burst on.

But the '80s were more than that to me. Almost every hit record of the '80s brings back a memory of my youth. Usually fond memories—but not always, as the memories were mostly quite foul once we get past the summer of '87. (Gee, wonder why?) A few '80s recollections are assisted. My friend told an interesting story from her childhood so vividly that I swear I saw almost the exact same thing but forgot about it for 30 years. This is also connected with the distorted view that some folks probably have of my '80s if they didn't know me back then. Before my spirit was broken, I wasn't some conforming sheep.

Stew to the rescue!

I bet that every week, Stew sat there with his calculator and compiled the top 40 survey all by his lonesome. Probably smoked a big cigar throughout. He probably even monitored every radio station on *Billboard's* panel to make sure they submitted an accurate playlist. I'm sure he'd pee on their transmitter if they didn't. When a song he liked hit #1, he probably celebrated by getting down on his hands and knees and rocking back and forth to the song. That's the way the top 40 works.

O to be Stew! Being Stew had to have been the best job in the world. He got to work with Casey Kasem *and* he got to compile the top 40 chart each week! Can you imagine?



Minneapolis City Council member gives opponent chewed gum

Meet Lisa Goodman, a longtime member of Minneapolis City Council. Goodman represents some of the city's wealthiest neighborhoods—and true to form, she has opposed much-needed efforts to raise the minimum wage.

Recently, Goodman arrived at a candidate forum chomping a big, juicy wad of bubble gum. It's unknown whether she bubbled. The blab won't report that part. As the event got under way, she turned to her opponent Teqen Zéa-Aida, extracted the quid of beegee from her mouth, and placed it right in Zéa-Aida's hand. Goodman then asked Zéa-Aida, "Would you take my gum please?"

Goodman’s sad excuse was that she couldn’t find any place to deposit the chewed gum.

After the forum, Zéa-Aida wrote on Facebook that the incident proves Goodman “is a master of nasty politics for sure!” A Zéa-Aida supporter called Goodman “a lame horse hee-haw.”

Best all, some news websites that ran this story referred to it in the headline as “ABC gum.” I came up with that term in high school, and it caught on everywhere else after only a few years. Wiktionary still doesn’t list it though.

Kennedy of MTV ate the 99%

“We are the 99%” will always mean “We are the 99%.” That’s why I have a tattoo of this saying. I don’t have to worry that its meaning will change, and there’s no reason ever to abandon this stance. Do you seriously think that after I’ve invested my entire adult life in fighting for the 99% that I’ll start supporting only the 1%? Thus, it’s safe to tattoo this timeless maxim anywhere on your bod. A tattoo will never go away—but neither will the positive power of this saying.

The capitalists can take away everything from me. My home, my krogie, everything. Everything, that is, except this tattoo.

Now, you may remember Kennedy, the bespectacled VJ on MTV. (Moves face towards reader.) Her original name is Lisa Kennedy Montgomery. (Moves face away from reader.) Since Kennedy left MTV, she’s been involved in an assortment of short-lived projects that are just as insignificant as MTV is now.

During Kennedy’s MTV years, the sad truth about her emerged: She was a conservative Republican. This surely didn’t help her popularity—but it must have helped her career, since The Media is so intent on blackballing anything that isn’t conservative. She was even invited to speak at the laughable 1996 Republican National Convention. And she got a pink elephant tattooed on her thigh—a symbol of the hated Republican Party.

Well, Kennedy has learned the hard way that tattoos are forever. She later realized that she was no longer “a Bush conservative.” It took her that long? Most of us had the sense to figure out we weren’t Bush cultists before getting a tattoo to indelibly memorialize this mistake.

A lifetime of humiliation looms for MTV’s Kennedy.

Running around in ovals

I used to think I was bonkers because I thought Michigan was shaped like a mitten—until I read a book about the 50 states that said, “Is Michigan shaped like a mitten?”

But some now insist that I’m as madcap as I once thought because I described the shape of bubbles blown with bubble gum as an oval. But make no mistake: They’re oval.

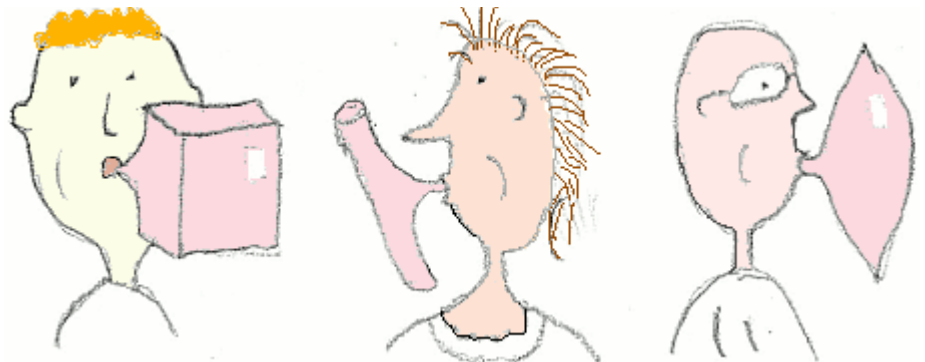
What do you think they are? Square? They’re ovoid and not even always ellipsoid. I had an in-depth discussion about this with someone recently, who insisted gum bubbles are perfectly round, not just oval. Nope, they’re oval. Not only that, but the oblateness of the oval changes as the bubble is being blown.

I noticed this in middle school. There was a girl on the school bus who always bubbled with the keenest efficiency. One day, she asked me a question, and she paused to blow a huge pink bubble. Nobody encouraged her to do it. She didn’t comment on it. She just did it. As I was answering whatever ridiculous question she had, I noticed that the bubble started as out being wider from side to side, but became bigger from top to bottom.

The reason for this is clear. A bubble starts out as wider because the human mouth is oblong. As the bubble expands, the vertical dimension becomes bigger than the horizontal dimension, because of gravity. I had read in *Guinness Book Of World Records* that the record for biggest bubble blown was measured on a horizontal axis rather than vertical, because gravity makes a vertical measurement inaccurate.

Go ahead. Bubble. Notice that your bubble is not a pyramid, cylinder, or flexagon that opens and closes and says, “You stink.” It’s ovoid.

Science!



When people plagiarized the Knack and thought it was cool

I think I've kept my cool about this as long as I possibly can.

Remember in the mid-'90s when there were all those songs that ripped off the Knack? I wouldn't be surprised if members of the Knack seriously considered suing for plagiarism. The songs that stole from the Knack were also likened to the Beatles and the Monkees—but *especially* the Knack! The Knack—like a lot of other bands—sport some Beatles influence, but there's a difference between influence and naked plagiarism.

There were 2 songs that were played on the radio constantly—and I mean *constantly*—in the mid-'90s that were almost the *same damn song!* And they both knocked off the Knack! Both songs were practically uncredited remakes of “Good Girls Don't.” Do you remember these? I associate these songs with the era when Q-102 used that “dlllloolldlllloolldllllooll” bed music for traffic reports that touched off a regional laughfest.

That was corporate radio's idea of “cool.” This was around the time people started bragging that they were “extreme”—when they were on the wrong extreme. I'm talking about folks who regularly voted Republican but pretended to be fighters against the Establishment.

Corporate radio's definition of “cool” was allowing the “Always Coca-Cola” jingle to chart in the nightly request countdown. By contrast, I was on WRFN at NKU, and I was doing some innovative stuff. For example, I had to read a PSA for a 21-and-over bash, but—to keep younger students from being left out—I mumbled “fake ID” in a torrent of coughing and throat-clearing sounds. Can you imagine something like that on corporate radio then or now?

Some gum is dumb

Beware of dangerous artificial sweeteners in brands of gum that used to be free of them.

The toxicity of aspartame has been swept under the rug even as this chemical fills more and more of our foodstuffs. This isn't some petty warning like the website that tells folks not to chew gum if they have fillings. This is serious. Aspartame is life-threatening if you have a disorder like phenylketonuria (PKU). It's also a gluten hazard, which can cause complications with other disorders.

I've heard complaints recently from folks who have had allergic reactions from masticating bubble gum that contained aspartame. I noticed years ago that my lip swells if I eat food that's even used the same dishes as items with aspartame. Sadly, our local Kroger stores sell very little gum that doesn't contain it.

Yet the gum industry seems determined to rob the glory from beegeeing by adding aspartame to brands that didn't previously have it. And their latest excuse is laughable.

A certain brand of gum has lost hordes of fans because of this change. Consumers of all ages loved this gum before, because it was a good bubble kerpowin' brand, and they could huff out mean bubbles with it in public. It wasn't one of the brands that I thought about that much, but—once in a great while—it cropped up at local retailers. When this brand added aspartame, a woman posted on Facebook about it because her husband has PKU and was “so bummed that a childhood favorite is something he can't have any more.” The reaction from other Facebookers was unanimously opposed to the addition of aspartame. Folks announced they were never buying this brand of beegee again.

The manufacturer's excuse for adding aspartame was that this chemical offers “extended flavor.” Seriously, that's their reasoning. But customers agree that it's a bad flavor.

The FDA should require foods with aspartame to contain a clear warning about its dangers. Some jurisdictions require items with sugar to carry a warning about tooth decay. Why does aspartame receive preferential treatment?

But at least it won't gunk up your fillings as much. Oh happy day.

How do you spell relief? G-U-M!

Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Gum is useful for something other than blowing bubbles! Granted, bubbling is still the only other known purpose of gumming—and it's the main one. Gum is wasted if you don't bubble. Sort of like how smartphones are wasted if you don't use them for phone calls. But did you know that gum also serves as a natural treatment for heartburn too?

I've been dogged by acid reflux for years, and it contributed to my hilarious gallbladder infection of 2011.



I tried antacids, and they didn't work. Prescription drugs have reduced the burning and vomit taste that woke me up almost every night, but it hasn't eliminated it completely, and it hasn't alleviated the heartburn.

So what's the last resort? Gum. Instead of "Tum-ta-tum-tums!", it should be "Gum-ga-gum-gum!"

My business partner recommended gum for heartburn and indigestion. Contrary to popular belief, she really doesn't gum that much. She gums only occasionally. Gum a sometime food like cookie. But there have been a couple occasions in which she left gum in my apartment, most recently with the demand that it be used as a heartburn treatment—"or suffer."

I was skeptical of this therapeutic use of gum, because it seems like the inevitable bubble blowing would cause the gummer to swallow air and worsen their heartburn. But in this crazy world we call reality, gum greatly relieves this condition. The saliva flow soothes the esophagus by diluting the harsh acids. This is a bit like the finding that putting hydrogen peroxide in one's ears staves off common colds—except that websites like WebMD actually support gum for heartburn. The hydrogen peroxide treatment for colds is still mostly swept under the rug, since Big Pharma doesn't want to let that cat out of the bag.

Another trick for reducing acid reflux is to, you know, chew your food before swallowing it. I had slacked in that regard.

Gum. You can chew it. You can bubble with it. You can grind used wads of it into your new carpeting. You can use it to seal cracks in the Panama Canal. And you can treat acid reflux with it. Has a more versatile substance ever been conceived?

It's a work of art!

Since 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts has enriched Americans' lives by supporting projects of artistic merit and bringing art to those who might not otherwise have access to it. NEA funding doesn't go only to fine art but also to more peoplefaced works—even writings that are not unlike the words you're reading right now. Art is naturally entitled to such support.

In 1996, the 104th Reich cut the NEA's funding roughly in half because of complaints by far-right hate groups like the misnamed American Family Association. Now the Trump regime is threatening to eliminate NEA funding altogether.

Meanwhile, as the NEA faces perennial threats to its mere existence, government handouts to the rich continue unabated. There are a lot of needless gimmies that burden the poor taxpayer, but now I've learned of another one: Kentucky gives a handout to country club members. I would have thought the state's 6% sales tax would apply to country club memberships—but it turns out it does not. It applies to almost every retail purchase except some basic food items—but country club memberships are exempt.

Can you believe that?

Now a state legislator has proposed ending this handout to the rich, but with all the right-wing corruption in the Bevin thugocracy, don't hold your breath.

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