

The Last Word™

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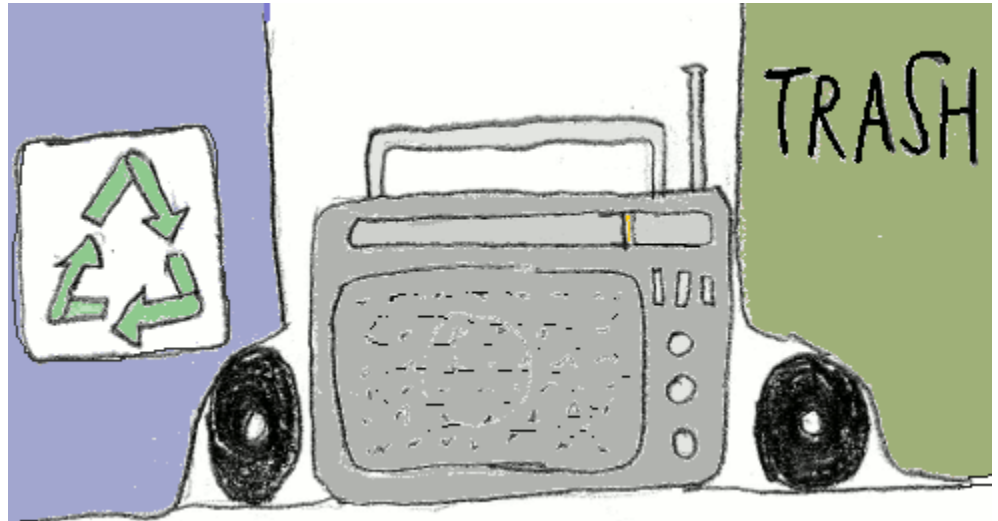
January 2019

I threw away my bizbud's radio

Hey. You know what paradise is?

It's relieving yourself of something that doesn't work but has taken up precious room in your apartment for over 15 years. This feeling should be savored like a good, satisfying shit.

My uproarious business partner says that—back in her youth—her parents bought a portable AM/FM radio because they were fans of some now-forgotten oldies DJ. This model of radio was top-of-the-line in those days. Sadly, as soon as they got this



radio, this DJ went off the air—never to be heard from again. So their investment swirled down the crapper.

You have to remember that this was the 1980s, so there was still a lot of fun and glamour in the radio biz. Fast forward to 2001. Those who recalled the magic of '70s and '80s radio were mostly grown—but couldn't give up the ghost even in the face of the fascist 1996 Telecommunications Act that decimated the industry. Why the fuck *should* we give up the ghost, considering how badly we were shafted? It's not our problem that we didn't like this law. It's Congress's problem for passing it. In 2001, I first met my bizbud after we both argued with a thin-skinned crybaby on an Internet message forum about Cincinnati radio.

At the time, my bizbud told me she had begged her parents to let her take the radio they'd purchased years earlier. Instead, they had made her buy one of her own. Unfortunately—as I mentioned in these pages in 2014—this model of radio had declined so much that it was now useless. Later, I found reviews on the Internet noting that the newer version was an inferior model that had been rebranded.

My business partner said you couldn't reliably pick up a single station on it. She insisted I try it at my place—and not give the radio back to her unless I could fix it for good. Sure enough, reception was nearly as bad here as it was at her home. You could get about 4 or 5 major Cincinnati stations, yet the few you could get were full of static no matter how close their transmitters were to us. You could get better reception on a Brossart kid's retainer that they accidentally dropped in the toilet after they pried it out for a fistfight.

I'm pretty sure I took this radio with me on my Magical Mystery Tour of 2005 and briefly tried listening to it in a motel room in upstate New York—and couldn't pick up anything at all.

A few weeks ago, after letting this radio collect dust in my place for years, I gave it one last chance. But there was no improvement. It was hopeless.

Before discarding a radio that didn't belong to me, I wanted to be absolutely certain that's what I was supposed to do. My bizbud again gave me the green light to consign it to the alley to be feasted upon by Oscar the Grouch himself.

Nnnnn! It's a great feeling!

I had this hulking radio that didn't even work hogging my apartment since the days of RealPlayer, *Grounded For Life*, and the Extremist—and its owner refused to reclaim it. What was I supposed to do? Bubble with it? I couldn't very well do that, because it wasn't gum. But now I could finally free myself of its poopy clutches. After I took it out to the alley, I posted a message on a local Facebook group inviting folks to help themselves to it in case they can fix it. Somebody did take it.

A few days earlier, I had freed up some space by getting rid of a few old books that I had absolutely no use whatsoever for. I hope the Little Free Library is enjoying that school textbook about Microsoft Office 2003.

In the meantime, that line of radios continues to get bad reviews that contrast it with older versions. Someone posted that they got the new version to replace an old one that worked better until they "left it out in the rain and ruined it." The magic word!

It begs asking why the FCC doesn't mandate better tuning on radios. It has the power to do so. As I noted in 2014, the FCC refuses to act because they want to protect big radio stations from out-of-town signals "invading" their "territory." Today, the radio business is like the Mafia—and they will protect their "territory." Recently, a right-wing ministry tried starting a small repeater station in Baltimore that would have done nothing but rebroadcast a station they already had there. This repeater would have been on the same frequency as a station in a nearby smaller city that had a lot of Baltimore listeners. Thus—by jamming that station—it would have protected major Baltimore stations from competition. But this plan was shelved when the jammed station caught on.

And the radio industry wonders why hardly anyone listens to radio anymore. The industry's wounds are self-inflicted. Radio could have survived the rise of YouTube without a scratch—but the radio business made a conscious choice not to adapt. Nobody held a gun to their heads and forced them to become irrelevant.

How cool people fail to roadtrip in South Carolina

You may know of the children's book *Fortunately*. One page would say something like, "Fortunately, Marvin got bubble gum." The next page would say something like, "Unfortunately, it was Care-Free."

I had planned on a possible fact-finding mission to South Carolina betwixt Christmas and New Year's. Fortunately, there is a national park there where it was warm.

Unfortunately, President Big Boy shut down the government.

Fortunately, national parks did not completely shut down.

Unfortunately, many of the parks' camping amenities did.

Fortunately, it rained all week, so I wouldn't have gone anyway. Tough toilets, Donald.

Let's be blunt about Eastern Front

Please tell me that one of the most popular computer games of the 1980s did not involve commanding Nazi troops as they march across Europe.

Well, guess what? It did.

Eastern Front (1941) was a game for Atari home computers released in 1981. This game recreated Nazi Germany's military operations that took place during World War II. The player would command Nazi units invading the Soviet Union. The game simulated Europe's weather and terrain, and depicted a map of the region that included cities and military brigades.

Eastern Front pioneered artificial intelligence. Unusual for computer or video games at the time, the computer would constantly strategize. The longer you took to give orders to your Nazi troops, the more time the computer had to think out strategy for the Soviets.

The game was widely praised by publications and gamers of that era. Reviewers loved its artificial intelligence and said it was a boon for the Atari brand. Many considered it one of the greatest games around. But while *Creative Computing* magazine called Eastern Front a "technical masterpiece", it's not hard to see how one might feel uneasy about the game's subject matter. Nazi armies??? Really???

I confess that I was actually better at Eastern Front than at other computer games, because it involved strategizing instead of good reflexes. But that was when I was about 11, so I didn't know anything about world history yet. I'd heard of World War II and Hitler, but I didn't know hardly anything about them. I don't think the game was intended as a political statement, but I'm sure I'm not the only person who'd be a bit uncomfortable about playing games that involve commanding Nazi military units. Then again, I should be equally uneasy about Monopoly—since there's not much difference between capitalism and fascism.

Who could forget the game's manual? It was an oblong booklet with a red cover. I vaguely recall that it was full of chest-beating about the big, bad Russians. Remember, this game came out at a time during the Cold War marked by increasing militarism. After reading the manual, someone who didn't know any better would think Nazi Germany was just the bees' knees all because it opposed communism.



The only bug I remember in Eastern Front was discovered when I went all the way to the northern edge of the map and scrolled off into empty space with a few remotely scattered features. I found lots of bugs in other games in those years. I remember a bug in the Atari version of Donkey Kong that enabled Mario to hide behind a burning oil barrel and score points by jumping barrels that would magically vanish before they could hit him.

I'm also sure I'm not the only person who thought they were a genius because they referred to "muster strength" as "mustard strength" after seeing it in Eastern Front.

Eastern Front was designed and developed by Chris Crawford—who was also the lead author of the book *De Re Atari*, which was about Atari computers' hidden advanced features. When I was middle school age and really getting into computers, one of my Holy Grails was to acquire this volume, but I could never find it in bookstores. The Wikipedia article about this book says, "By 1985 *De Re Atari* was out of print." When I saw that, I was tempted to add, "due to Reagan."

Artificial intelligence also figured prominently in recent years in a program I wrote in FreeBASIC that would find the quickest bicycle routes in greater Cincinnati. I programmed my little progie-wogie to think as a real cyclist would. Voila! Artificial intelligence!

I'm pretty sure I still have all my old Atari game cartridges—unless they were stolen in the home invasions of 2009-10, which is possible, because I don't remember seeing them since then. I wish you could get a special device that lets you use them with newer computers. In a fair world, there's no reason why there wouldn't be. But instead, it's another investment wasted—as no effort was made to make newer computers compatible with older equipment. I know I wouldn't have time to constantly play all these old games—but I'm sure visitors could enjoy them. Sooner or later, they're going to get bored with just talking about bubble gum and General Motors all the time.

A person broke a brand new big-screen TV and didn't think it was so damn funny

Imagine if you had a TV.

Imagine if you could pick up *Sesame Street* on it.

Imagine—we're getting into the high life here—that it's not just a TV but a brand new 60-inch big-screen!

Now imagine if you broke it beyond redemption.

It happened to someone on the Internet a few years ago. They say they bought a spanking new Samsung 60-inch TV with their own hard-earned money. That's *humongous*!

And they wasted the TV almost immediately.

While mounting the TV to their wall, they broke the antenna socket off the back of the set. The only fix for that is to replace the motherboard, which the socket was welded to. That would cost as much as a whole new TV.

I know this, because the antenna socket on my TV that's 11 years old is bad too—and I had to create a workaround for it. But that won't work if the socket is broken off completely.

Some suggested filing a warranty claim with Samsung under the "goods not fit for intended purpose" clause. This means the socket broke because it was of poor quality—not because it was abused. And that's Samsung's fault. But don't expect Samsung to accept this claim, because other folks say Samsung fights people on warranty claims no matter how obvious it is.

One person says they spent \$1,500 on a 65-inch Samsung that died after only 3 months because of an internal hardware failure. Samsung twice scheduled repairers to come out to look at the TV—but canceled at the last minute, claiming the TV broke because it was abused. Plus, Samsung blocked this complainant on Facebook.

Another person says their big-screen Samsung was already broken when they opened the box, and Samsung fought them on that. Another says Samsung broke their TV while delivering it and refused to replace it. There were so many complaints about Samsung doing this same thing that a class action lawsuit was threatened.

Best Buy has been the subject of complaints surrounding their sale of defective big-screen TV sets of other brands. One customer spent over \$1,000 on a 65-inch TV and found it was already broken when they unpackaged it—and Best Buy refused to offer an exchange or refund. When they complained on Best Buy's website, Best Buy tried blaming them for the damage and kept posting smarmy replies that they couldn't exchange the set.

You may have a family member who cries, "Yergonnabreakit yergonnabreakit yergonnabreakit!" if you handle an item in a way that doesn't even come close to breaking it. Later, when they break it themselves, they say it's because you were "careless" with it earlier. It's like the time a disk full of Atari programs got corrupted, and a program I wrote was blamed even though it had absolutely nothing to do with it. That's what Best Buy



reminds me of. Best Buy won't accept responsibility for what it ruined and instead blames everyone else.
Just like a big baby.

When Atari BASIC did some bubble gum bustin'!

People—usually not cool people—ask me why I don't apply for a job at a software company.

Not only do I not have that sheepskin that so many others have, but my computer programming knowledge is limited to a couple kinds of BASIC. The corporate world stopped taking BASIC seriously in approximately 1984—despite BASIC's many advantages. (“Butbutbut something something elderly people something McDonald's buh.”)

Can you imagine if I go in for a job interview and the boss asks me to write a program and the first thing I type is “POKE 710,0” or “FOR A=1 TO X”? Hey, I should do it!

Or how about “POP”?

Atari BASIC—which I was an expert at—had a POP command. Despite my Atari BASIC proficiency, I could never for the life of me figure out what the POP command did. I mentioned POP in a chatroom just recently, and someone said it “popped” commands off a “stack”, but I still don't know what that means.

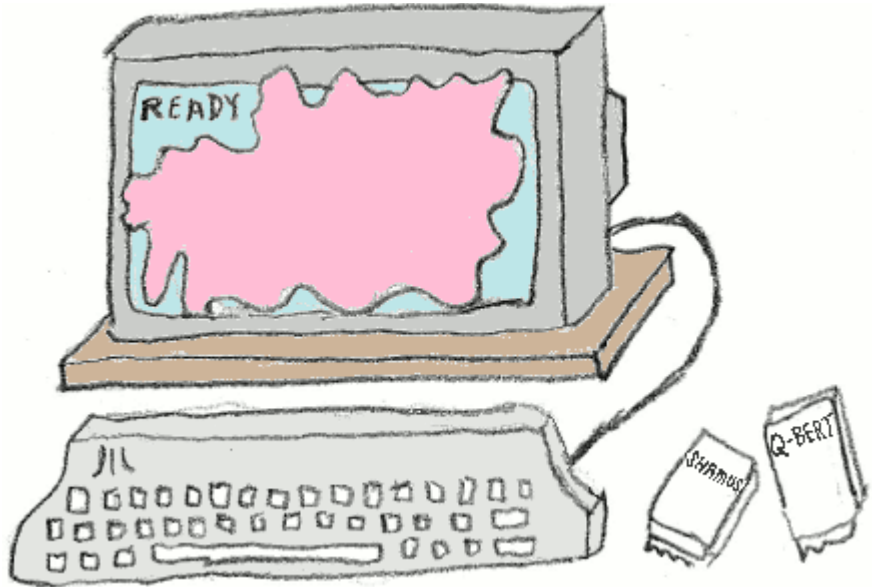
I first saw the POP command when I was 9 and couldn't figure it out then. So I decreed that it must have had something to do with bubble gum. I managed to convince people that POP turned the screen pink—like when you blow a gigantic bub that pops and covers your glasses (something you regularly do).

After about 255 milliseconds, the joke wore thin, and a family member would become enraged when I would make this claim about the POP command. When said family member experimented with Atari BASIC, I'd be sitting in the armchair behind them (often listening to WCLU on the boom box), and I'd say something like, “You should include a POP so the screen turns pink.” Then they'd march towards me with an angry scowl and fists doubled up, and I'd burst into laughter!

Recently, when I posted a thread about POP on a highway transport forum, someone replied that Python also has POP, which seems to do the same thing as in Atari BASIC, “popping” items off the all-important “stack.” Someone else said their high school taught BASIC in the early 1970s—which our high schools here still weren't doing yet 20 years later. Of course. If I hadn't taught myself BASIC, I could have a real case for suing the Kentucky Department of Education for gross malpractice for neglecting to teach what the rest of the country had been learning for 20 years.

Sadly, FreeBASIC does not have a POP command. There's actually a few things Atari BASIC could do that FreeBASIC apparently cannot. For instance, FreeBASIC's RESTORE command is completely different from what I was brung up with. And there's no XIO anywhere in sight! Heaven forbid!

Atari BASIC. It was the people's programming language (even if nobody ever used it to sort their MP3's or read shapefiles of the Kentucky state highway system).



I want to be a pirate!

I'm no longer satisfied with being just a bandit. Now I want to be a pirate too!

A website of a dental practice asks, “Have you ever noticed that pirates all seem to have bad teeth?” This makes piracy a perfect profession for cool people such as me. I'm reading up on 18th century pirates, and they weren't all violent villains. Many were peaceful heroes who had some of the most civilized social and economic policies in the world.

A bandit is a bit like a pirate—only mostly on land. A bandit is quite literally a person who is outlawed, though sources differ on whether the word shares its origin with *ban*. But—even as a landlocked Midwesterner—the high seas are coursing through my veins!

For years, one of my goals in life has been to visit international waters. But the Ohio River is the next best thing. The riv once teemed with pirates. They lived in small river towns and roved as much as they dared. Some operated out of caves.

I'm a cool person, but I'm not a *people* person. I'm a bad fit for the corporate world, and I don't have the personality, looks, or eye contact suited to a job that compels me to put on a fake smile for ungrateful, spoiled customers all day. And frankly, I just hate, hate, hate low-paying service jobs—which are the only jobs around here, and there aren't many of those either. I went to school far too long to work at such an unprofitable, miserable job at 45. I invested a lot of time, money, energy, and patience in my college education. I'm not saying this out of elitism, but out of populism. Even if you've never made it past middle school—and whatever your life story—you have a right to an adequate job. If you want to work at a bad job, go for it, but I think you're entitled to something better. Too often, people around the world find themselves as victims of various levels of economic exploitation—and that's not the way life is supposed to work. I can't afford to be pushed around—because we've all seen how that ends.

I've also been accused of having a disorder for which I've been advised by a professional against taking such a job. Plus, I've suffered from PTSD since I was 17.

I will earn my keep. I have pride in work, and I do not believe in loafing. I'm under orders to limit my workload, but one's workload should be proportional to their health, so I won't give up until my health is even worse than it is now.

And that's why I want to work as a pirate! Alright, a land pirate, since we don't have an ocean. A bandit, if you will. I want to be an even better bandit than before. Everyone else became so wussified in the '90s that I have a duty to provide balance by showing people how to live up to their aspirations.

Like many pirates of centuries ago, I want to use my trade as a force for good. Many old pirates were pioneers of democratic socialism, and that's a plus. People suffer a lot of shit—much of it sponsored by supposedly friendly regimes—and piracy should be a positive force again. I know local geography like the back of my hand, and there's still just enough elbow room around here that I can wink out of sight and do almost whatever I please—all for free. I could probably gather everything I need. Would life be easier if I didn't have to? Well, yes. But a life of sitting by the hot tub all day while eating bonbons and watching cartoons isn't the hand capitalism dealt us.

Of course, if most of the local computer bulletin board systems hadn't been raided by Simon Leis (the Joe Arpaio of Cincinnati), I'd have to list my occupation as bandit—not pirate, because the neo-McCarthyists who cluttered local BBS's would get the wrong idea, as they thought there was a software pirate hiding under every bed. For them to label you as a software pirate was considered worse than being called a communist or a fascist.

As a land pirate, I would blend the best old traditions with modern technology and taste! In the immortal words of Adam Ant, I have an 18th century brain in a 21st century head!

Think. Do. Be.



A person broke an antique Hudepohl bottle that was probably worth thousands

If this event had taken place a decade ago, I could have compiled it in convenient book form to be sold to Make Money from. But now we live in the age of social media—so news travels way too fast!

Especially when it's about breaking antique beer bottles that were worth a fortune.

Hudepohl was a popular Cincinnati brewery—though now it's a subsidiary of Christian Moerlein. In grade school, we went to the Hudepohl brewery on a field trip. We didn't get free beer samples though.

Not long ago, people were discussing Hudepohl on a Facebook page of local interest. One fella mentioned that he happened to have in his very possession a true rarity: an unopened glass Hudy bottle from 40

years ago that was issued to commemorate one of our local sports teams. I can't remember if it was the Reds, the Bengals, or the Stingers, but it was a very limited edition.

This bottle had to have been worth thousands of dollars. It was sealed and still contained all the beer. Not a drop had been imbibed.

You can see where this story is going.

The man posted that his very next post would be a photo of this rare bottle.

Well, it was. Only not in the condition he hoped to post it. It was a photo of a shattered Hudepohl bottle on a concrete floor—with beer all around it.

He was so eager to show off this prized bottle that when he went to his basement to grab it, he accidentally let it tumble onto the floor—breaking it into a zillion shards.

And so, another beer bottle returned to the windswept sands from which it derived!



Hotel iron ruins brand new shirt

A person actually still irons their shirts???

At a *hotel*???

Hahahahaha! Hahahahahahahahaha!!! Hahahahaha!

As the permacloud settles in until June, we're trying to keep our spirits up by looking for bad—and therefore funny—hotel reviews. And I found one regarding a hotel in London.

A man said that a rusty iron provided in the motel room stained his brand new shirt beyond reclamation. He said in his review, "The iron ruined my shirt."

RUINED!!!!!!!!!! IT'S THE MAGIC WORD, EVERYONE!!!!!!!!!!

To celebrate a review using the word *ruined*, I feel like using Atari graphics symbols to make a huge blow-up of this word on a computer screen and awkwardly dancing around the room to an old *Countdown America* bumper while wearing parachute pants with green fluorescent bubble gum stuck to the knee.

Another reviewer of this inn says its employees stole beer from the refrigerator in their room.

Nuisance law? What nuisance law?

As your road atlas to freedom, we've always been critical of cities, counties, and states passing "quality of life" ordinances that micromanage every conceivable situation. But this shit is fucking ridiculous.

About 2 years ago, I *finally* got a trucking company to stop squeaking their brakes in the middle of the night by leaving them voicemails imitating the noise. The trucks were on their way to and from the useless Manhattan Harbour construction project everyone opposes. Bellevue conveniently took down its "NO LOUD MUSIC" signs right when the project began—proving the noise law was aimed at everyday people, not corporations that create noise pollution just for the sheer meanness of it.

Lately, we've been treated to a stinker of a rerun, as a different firm involved in the same project has begun making just as much noise—and probably doing even more property damage. Often in the evening, their truck zooms through the alley—even though thru trucks are prohibited in alleys. The truck took out part of a brand new wall surrounding someone's back yard, but they've kept at it.

Then the truck parks at a parking lot they don't own and takes up at least 3 parking spaces. Around 6 AM the next morning, the truck idles for a half-hour, spewing exhaust fumes into the air—which is also illegal. Every 30 seconds or so, the truck makes a loud "whoosh!" that wakes up the whole neighborhood. We know the noise from both the aforementioned companies is unnecessary, because other trucking businesses involved in that project don't make noise like this.

To combat this malicious abuse of our community, I invested in earplugs and a machine that creates soothing sounds to drown out the noise. That's in addition to a sound machine I already had and a radio tuned to an empty channel. Both of those together weren't enough to mask the truck noise.

The new purchases didn't cost that much in total, but I hadn't used earplugs in years, because they contributed to a recurring ear infection once before, and now I risk it happening again. Whatever the weather, I shouldn't have had to buy anything—because I'm already paying taxes to Bellevue just to have the city not enforce noise or other ordinances.

I'm reminded of the light pollution and wasted electricity that afflicted Highland Heights in my day. Back when I was about 13—in the wake of Halley's Comet—we got big into stargazing. During our 1986 family

vacation to Washington, D.C.—the one where someone kept farting the whole time—we went to a presentation on astronomy. Hilariously, some kid kept loudly popping bubble gum during it, so I couldn't hear the whole talk. I have nothing against people busting beegee as noisily as possible. After all, cool people do it all the time. But the trade-off was not getting to hear much of the presentation. Back home, however, stargazing was hampered by light pollution.

In one direction, there was a shopping center that kept its lights on all night. They didn't need the lights on, because every store in that development closed at about 5 PM. The lights were so bright that they completely obliterated an entire section of the sky. In another direction, there was a single poorly placed streetlight. We openly wished we could shoot it out with a BB gun, since it wasn't doing any good where it was.

Around that time, I heard there were plans by the country's biggest advertisers for a new form of advertising. It would involve painting their logos on the nighttime sky with lasers. The logos would then sail across the sky. Someone noted at the time that this would "mess up astronomy." Could you imagine a professional astronomer peering through one of those giant telescopes as a Pepsi logo drifts into view?

The construction-related noise pollution that plagues Bellevue is equivalent to this attempt to commercialize our sky. The health effects of noise pollution on humans and animals are many. It contributes to high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, and cardiovascular disease in humans. It interferes with detection of predators and prey among wildlife.

There's no way a city can or should pass a law against every possible nuisance. But we have a right to expect major construction companies to at least be held to the same tough laws that govern everyone else. If I blared music at half the volume created by those construction trucks, there's no way in shit it would be tolerated for very long.



All I want for Christmas is...well, not this

Where in the Wide, Wide World Of Sports do people get these ridiculous ideas?

Since this is our January ish, you've probably broken all your shiny new toys you got as holiday gifts by now, so let's look fiveward to the next holiday season.

My bizbud requested that I write about this, and I could have sworn I saw something about this in the Northern Kentucky Tribune. I can't find it on the Tribune's website now, but such a topic would be typical. The Trib likes to stovepipe Matt Bevin's debunked employment stats and run ridiculous right-wing op-eds—including a guest editorial claiming that the crying girl photo on a recent *Time* cover is a hoax. Self-improvement articles that appear in the Tribune are likely to be just as preposterous.

Sure, once in a while, the Trib will slip up and run a useful article, but it's not common. Remember, the Tribune was started by *Kentucky Post* folks, and the *Post* in its later years wasn't exactly a champion of progressive populism. The Trib is like the *Post* without its legendary "Town Crier."

In the immortal words of Carmine Guzman, let's cut to the chase.

We saw something online recently about giving Invisalign as a holiday gift. And the idea is patently absurd. This ranks right up there with the Speedway commercial that advertised gift cards for gasoline. Who wants gasoline for Christmas?

For one thing, there's nothing wrong with crooked teeth. Cool people all agree on that. Besides that, the idea of giving Invisalign as a gift is simply...weird. Expensive too. But mostly weird. And mostly expensive. The website of one dental practice blares, "You want to surprise your loved ones with just the right thing—and we've got a gift idea no one is expecting." Maybe nobody expected it because nobody wanted it. The site says that "you can gift your loved one an initial consultation" to see if their "misalignment" can be treated.

Lots of folks I know asked Santa for world peace (and maybe a few books and electronics). I don't know anybody who asked for a dental appointment. I can understand if a person who is thoroughly impoverished uses a charity program to receive routine dental care. But *this*???

I hear "Weird Al" Yankovic's "First World Problems" playing in my head.

Other dental practices laughably advertise other orthodontic treatment as a gift. One has a pre-Christmas article that says that "there isn't a whole lot of time left to get your kids the best gift of the year: braces." Call me weird, but I don't remember anyone in my day asking for braces for Christmas. I thought the best gift of the year was the Amaze-a-Tron! After seeing that article, I ought to sit in the waiting room at the nearest orthodontist office and make Amaze-a-Tron sounds all day.

Doodoodoodoodoot! Beep beep beep beep braaaaap!



Article figures out something I've known for 30 years

I have respect for books, and I worked at the local library for years. Above all else, I'm a writer.

But here's an article from just a few months ago that describes how our schools are taking the fun out of reading...

<https://mybookcave.com/are-high-schools-ruining-reading-for-our-kids>

Gee, thanks for the news flash, Kermit. That article finally talks about something I've known since middle school over 30 years ago. In fact, I've discussed this same phenomenon in these pages.

The long and short of it is this: Schools are destroying our young people's interest in reading—so much so that many students never read another book again after they graduate. Schools accomplish this by assigning uninteresting books and awkwardly analyzing them in ways that nobody can relate to.

There's just no excitement in books assigned by schools. I knew this. It should be obvious to everyone.

If only somebody had warned the outside world that this was the case. Wait, I did—more than once.

Mumblers and mouthers...Consumed by the fires...

Everyone has peeps who mumble. At the other extreme, everyone also has peeps who mouth things so that you can clearly read their lips but they won't say it out loud. Neither one of them are necessarily a main peep—but a peep nonetheless.

Mumblers and mouthers have one thing in common: Both are obnoxious.

And both will be ignored by me from now on. That's my new year's resolution!

What a person says must not be too important if they mumble it so you can't hear it. And, if what a person says might hurt someone's feelings if they say it out loud, they shouldn't mouth it either.