

The Last word™

Issue #563

September 2021

A new trip to the Old Dominion!

From August 25 to 27, I went on a fact-finding mission to Roanoke and the hills of western Virginia, northeastern Tennessee, and eastern Kentucky!

In a lifetime of dozens of vacation trips, this one will stand out in its own unique ways. Some of my trips didn't have many unusual events, and I don't have many mementos from them. For instance, my 1993 trip to the Mid-Ohio Valley wasn't bad, but I don't have much to show from it. Nobody else even remembers that I went on this outing. A 2015 trip to the Southeast was decent, but nothing strange happened. I recall a few trips to the South about a decade ago that seem to bleed together, but they weren't completely uneventful. This includes the one where I noticed a piece of shit on a hotel room floor in Alabama.

My Roanoke trip had its share of noteworthy happenings. In every city and town, people bopped around smiling their asses off. I walked around downtown Roanoke for a bit and sauntered into a public building in search of a tinkletorium. Everyone grinned widely in the food court and elevators until the quest for a beethoom was satisfied. I noticed the lavatory had pee everywhere. Cool also.

The following day, a waitress in Abingdon, Virginia, approached our table and began talking about the Bible. Also, she was chewin' bubble gum! She didn't bubble. But she was chewin' bubble gum!

The motel for the first night was in Roanoke, and the second night was in Kingsport, Tennessee. Both inns had a '70s look, having appeared to have been free of upgrades for 50 years. Best all, the lamp in the hotel room in Kingsport looked like the lampshade was upside-down...



It's sort of like in the mid-'80s when everyone wore eyeglasses that looked like they were upside-down. If Quiet Riot was singing about that lampshade, their heads would be upside-down!

Believe!

Closing the book on dog-doo in libraries

Keek! Ruin!

You may be aware of the Little Free Libraries—those little stands full of books you can borrow. I've unloaded a few books there, usually because the authors decided that getting paid by Google or the Chinese Communist Party to spread debunked narratives was more important than giving new insight to millions of fans they betrayed, so I didn't need their books anymore.

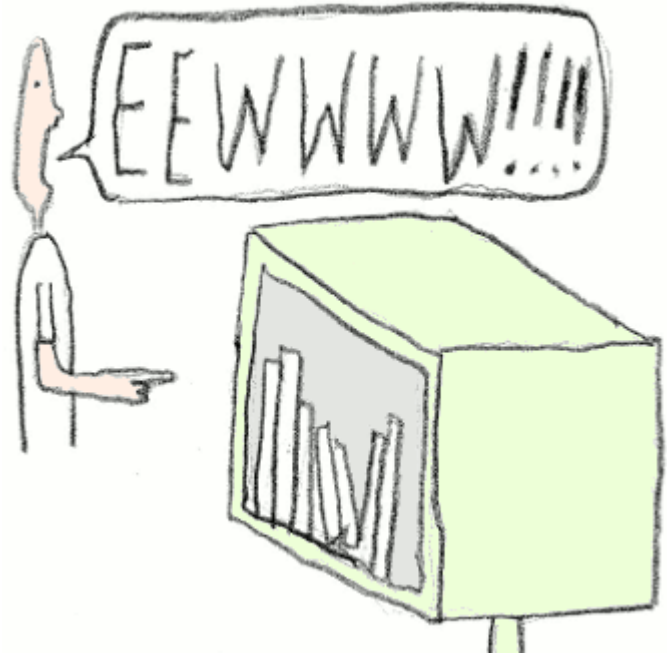
But lately, dog feces has been growing everywhere, menacing these beautiful libes.

Someone posted in the Bellevue group on Facebook about it. He said 3 boys—ages about 10 to 12—have been “causing trouble in Bellevue.” He said the tiny tots “were trespassing [sic] in our carport today as well as

putting dog crap in our little library and ruining all the books.”
The magic word!

Somebody replied that it wasn't going to go on for much longer, because school was starting soon. Um, no it wasn't. Even with COVID evolving to become an endemic illness, it looks like it's yet another year of remote "learning." To most kids, that means that summer vacation that began in March 2020 is going to last until August 2022. That is, if they continue making the best of it instead of wasting time on Zoom.

I'm lucky I saw that post before it got deleted. Lately, almost every time I get a notification that there's a new post in that group that looks interesting, it gets deleted before I can read it. Recently, I got a notification containing the first few words of a message I really wanted to read, which started out something like: "Today at Frisch's..." If a post begins with those words, you know it'll probably be funny, but it was erased before I got to read it. Somebody also posted a link to a petition I wanted to sign, and I was fortunate enough to catch it moments before it got deleted. Among the few posts that stay up these days are spam, proselytizing, or members of the nobility whining.



Home of the Hoosiers has some boozers!

Snap Map is back! Circus Vargas, Circus Vargas! In fact, it never went away!

You may remember Snap Map being a source of fodder for this zine last school year, as it was ubiquitous on college campuses—at least at those that didn't maliciously spoil the year by going mostly online. As a new school year begins, now we're back for more (as Ratt would say)!

A couple weeks ago, I went on Snap Map to see if anything cool was happening at Indiana University. I clicked on one of the aqua circles and saw a brief clip from what was clearly a class being conducted in a classroom. It was from the intersession before the fall semester began. A professor was writing on the whiteboard, and a few students were sprinkled throughout the room. Class was skipping along and appeared indistinguishable from a normal year.

But as I watched again, my eyes did detect an anomaly. The camera darted over 3 blue Bud Light beer cans resting on a desk. The desk in front of that also sported a Bud Light can.

Why, that means people beered in class!

There is hope for our colleges yet! A lot of online message boards and feeds about colleges are full of neckbeards and incels who live in their parents' basement. But their posts represent only their own funhouse mirror view of the world.



Gentrification comeuppance in Bellevue

After Bellevue spent years rubber-stamping every gentrification land grab, we can now get ready for some operatic grousing from officials who can't seem to understand why it didn't bring the results they promised.

The numbers from the 2020 census are finally rolling out, and it reveals that in the course of 10 years,

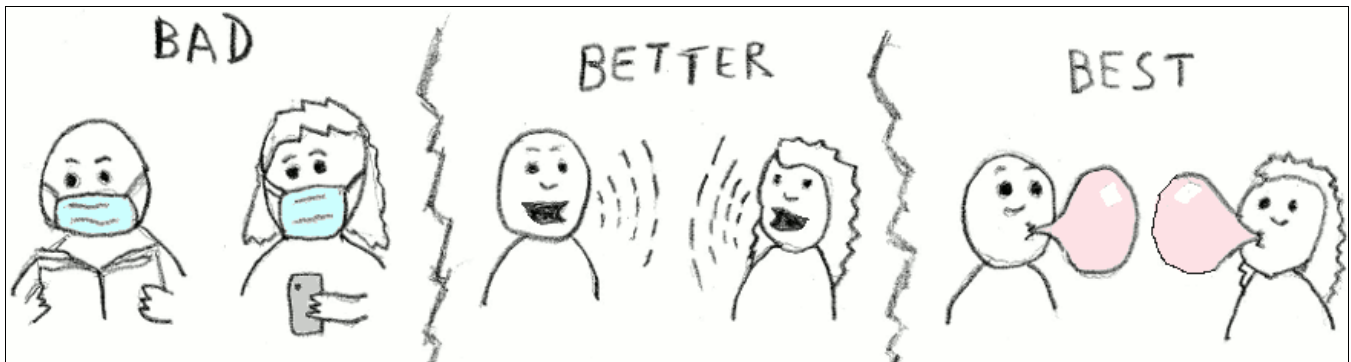
Bellevue's reported population managed to decline from 5,955 to 5,548. That's because so many working-class residents were priced out of the city by gentrification.

This means Bellevue is now smaller than neighboring Dayton, though the latter only increased from 5,338 to 5,666. You might think Dayton would have grown by much more, considering the sheer size of the Manhattan Harbor gentrification boondoggle, but it too saw many residents priced out. Privileged gentrists have swarmed our cities like locusts, but this encroachment has been offset by the loss of poor and working-class residents.

America's major cities are *damn lucky* it's a 2020 census and not a 2021 census. The difference between urban and rural areas in their pandemic response was like night and day. Urban areas did horribly, and residents fled the cities like they're kryptonite after the census was conducted. Avid lockdowners did the same thing Pol Pot did by forcing people to leave the cities. Who wants to pay the inflated rents of New York or San Francisco just to see the whole city shut down and turned into a totalitarian police state? You could live in rural New Hampshire or Montana at a fraction of the cost and have much more freedom. A bigger predictor of the pandemic response though is a community's wealth, with richer areas doing worse. And perhaps a bigger predictor than average personal income is average rent. This appears to be because rents are higher where land is scarcer, so high-rent areas have more people to boss around.

We're in a "brave" new era of urban fascism—which makes the Contract With America era look like the Age of Enlightenment in comparison.

Vaccine cards a shot in the arm for gum wall



(This drawing is a fair use parody. Luckily, people who support making draconian COVID-19 restrictions permanent are usually people who also think copyright law shouldn't protect fair use, so I only risk being blacklisted by one group.)

A gum wall is a wall in a public place that people have coated with chewed wads of gum. You know, that stuff you blow bubbles with.

Gum walls are—unfortunately—few and far between. You may recall that last year I visited the one in Greenville, Ohio. The biggest and most famous is Bubblegum Alley in San Luis Obispo, California. According to rumor, there's a gum wall in a mall elevator near Chattanooga that is hidden behind a panel and is rarely accessible.

The only other gum wall we know of is the Market Theater Gum Wall in Seattle. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee—an idiot and a tyrant—used to be less of an idiot and a tyrant. He once called this beautiful wall his "favorite thing about Seattle you can't find anywhere else." Except in Greenville or San Luis Obispo, that is.

Recently I analyzed the Market Theater Gum Wall on Snap Map. Everyone was bippin' and boppin' through the alley, and I could almost smell the zesty goo through my computer screen. But I looked closely and saw something very interesting.

People had stuck their COVID-19 vaccination cards on the wall using bubble gum. Scientists toiled for a year developing vaccines, and I presently believe the vaccines work, for vaccines in general have had a good track record for hundreds of years—since before big drug companies inserted themselves into medicine. But when people finally got vaccinated, they left their cards in an alley covered with gum. It ain't easy to get a replacement card. On the other hand, does it do any good for anyone to prove they got vaccinated? We were promised that vaccination was our ticket out of draconian policies, but that turned out to be a lie. Anyone who believed this promise had their bubble burst.

Folks also stuck masks on the wall with beegie. This means they



wore a mask as they were chomping their gum on the way to the wall. This in turn means it was quite likely that they bubbled with a mask on, thereby wasting the mask in a hilarious manner.

We can only guess how rainy Seattle weather will affect the vaccine cards and masks. Rain will probably make the paper rot away—leaving the gum behind to make us all laugh!

It's only make-believe

Part of life is surprising yourself. Sometimes you think of weird things when you're tossing around in bed. It's not just dreamlike things you think of when you're dozing off, but also ongoing themes of getting back at evildoers.

I felt life crumbling as we slogged into the late '90s. Why, America was fast becoming a police state, and I was afraid we might someday wake up in an America we don't recognize. Gee, there was no way that was ever going to happen, was there? Anyway, after receiving a series of abusive Internet messages one day, I was annoyed enough to take action—if only those who issued this abuse were people I knew in real life.

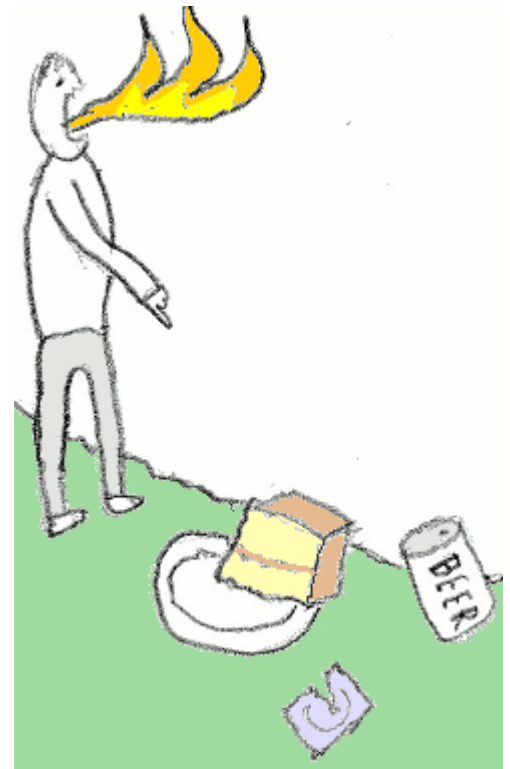
So I had to create real-life villains in my mind. It's only make-believe. Can you say make-believe? Sure you can.

Remember, this was when I lived at my old apartment—even before the onslaught of online harassment that came just after that. As I laid down in bed, I imagined that a house next door was inhabited by a pushy, whiny crybaby. I also imagined that I threw a wild party where people beered.

In this story I dreamed up, the party went on into the middle of the night. Beer cans, paper plates, used fireworks, burned paper, plastic forks, and discarded cake ended up in the whiny neighbor's backyard as it sloped down from the yard of my building.

In this fictional narrative, the real fireworks began when the neighbor woke up for the day and found the rubbish in the yard! To think of the look on the neighbor's face! I envisioned the mess through the neighbor's eyes as it was discovered.

This also shows why I'm a nonfiction writer. If anything requires too much imagination, I get caught up in the humor or boredom of it before developing the story.



We made fun of a bunch of school films

Educational films and TV shows they showed us in school were a whole new dimension of life just itching to be ridiculed. As with the *Wild Kingdom* TV series I discussed last month, I'm sure their intentions were good, but we could always find something to poke fun at.

In 5th grade, we were shown a TV show that featured a youngster roaming around in a city in Quebec. He kept approaching strangers and asking them, "Do you speak English?" They always replied in French. As he fell into a fit of frustration, he got this look on his face like he was taking a shit.

For 30 years, everyone said I was making it up, but finally this show appeared on YouTube. It turned out the show was intended as a lesson against prejudice. But we missed the show's positive message back in 5th grade because we kept goofing off through most of it.

Another episode from one of these series we watched in 5th grade was about a boy entering a photo contest and having his negatives stepped on by a rival—which ruined them. Yes, the magic word was used. The way the negatives were destroyed was the same way we used to shred school papers by walking on them. It looked sort of like the moonwalk. I somehow forgot about this episode until it was found on YouTube. Another episode showed a kid stepping on another's toy dinosaurs and breaking them. I have yet to find this on YouTube.

Those series had valuable lessons. I'm less sure of the videos we watched in high school. When I was a senior, they kept showing videos that were clearly geared towards a much younger audience. When the childish logo popped up at the start of the video, groans were always heard. Many of these films were ancient. This was in the early 1990s, but they dated as far back as the early 1970s—perhaps even earlier.

And nobody paid any attention to them. I remember one old movie that started off with a view of what looked like the Las Vegas Strip at night as the theme music played. All I remember is that it had a Burger King. The movie was about some kid who had big dreams of getting into show business and got in a huge argument with their parents about it. The film was so old that I was surprised it was even available on videotape. I didn't pay a shred of attention to this video after the first 30 seconds or so. Somebody in our class kept loudly popping bubble gum—which of course was hilarious—and the school counselor in the room got mad.

When the counselor had to choose a film for us, it was probably an unenviable task. It was probably also an unnecessary task, because the whole point of this class was to warehouse students instead of teach them. I think she just grabbed a random video off a library shelf. It could have turned out to be porn or a pyramid scheme seminar instead.

I can't drive 5

Bishop Brossart High School in the late '80s didn't have the highest quality discourse or the most intelligent conversation topics. You can compare my different high schools to modern online message forums: My later high school experience was like Reddit in that it had a lot of intelligent dissent against a heavy-handed system. But Brossart was like 4chan.

More accurately, it was like 5chan.

I remember one of my classmates who always acted like he was my friend when we were around others, but one day when nobody important was looking, he shoved me against the wall in a classroom and slugged me with all his might. I got the impression that he wasn't exactly a great intellectual.

One afternoon, we were on the school bus on the way home from school. The bus zipped past Cold Spring Elementary School. The school parking lot had one of the lowest posted speed limits in the area: "SPEED LIMIT 5."

So this student came up with a really smart plot. He outlined a detailed plan to sneak down to this lot in the middle of the night with some paint. He planned to paint "PEEPS" under the 5 on the sign.

That was the whole plan. Yep, that'll show everyone!

The next day, I fully expected to see "PEEPS" painted on the sign. Naturally, however, this student had wimped out.

At one of Brossart's Walk-a-Thons, a group of students climbed up the post of a speed limit sign and knocked it over. That probably had no planning at all, but someone couldn't even fail to paint "PEEPS" on a sign without drawing up a complicated plan that they didn't carry out.



Fun with encyclopedias

Why do people buy only part of a set of encyclopedias?

When I was growing up, we bought individual volumes of encyclopedias at yard sales. I remember one time, we got one volume. One other time, we purchased about 5 volumes of a different set. One day at the library in Covington, there was a group of kids on a field trip being given a tour. I overheard the man who led the tour tell the kids that the reason they don't let patrons borrow reference books is that if they lose one volume, the whole set is "ruined." If that's the case, we managed to lay hulk to a couple encyclopedia sets by buying only part of the set.

Around the time we had these encyclopedias—when I was about 7 or 8—I had a short list of moderately famous people who had either just died, had an encyclopedia entry, or who I had seen briefly mentioned in a book. Any unexpected mention of any of these people caused me to burst out laughing. Any time there was some project involving famous people or non-player characters, I would use the names of these people. One was made up completely: After seeing a bottle of Henri's salad dressing, I came up with a character named Henri. It turned out there actually was a famous person named Henri who lived right around the same time as this character.

I read something in a book about a famous doctor who studied the human body by cutting a hole in one of his patients and watching his veins pump blood. So I bit a big hole in a slice of bread and looked through it and pretended to be this doctor.

In 8th grade, encyclopedia sets got ruined by students grabbing one volume and stashing it away in their desks, after which it would mysteriously vanish or get thrown across the room.

In recent years, people on the public Internet have mentioned encyclopedia sets getting spoiled when volumes are lost. In 2014, a woman asked how she could replace the *H* volume of her 1976 edition of *World Book*. She wrote, "A friend's child borrowed it and lost it. Now my set is incomplete."

In 2018, someone asked where to find volume 10 of a 20-volume encyclopedia from 1950: "My number 10 got destroyed." The commenter did not say how it got destroyed. Did the VCR eat it?

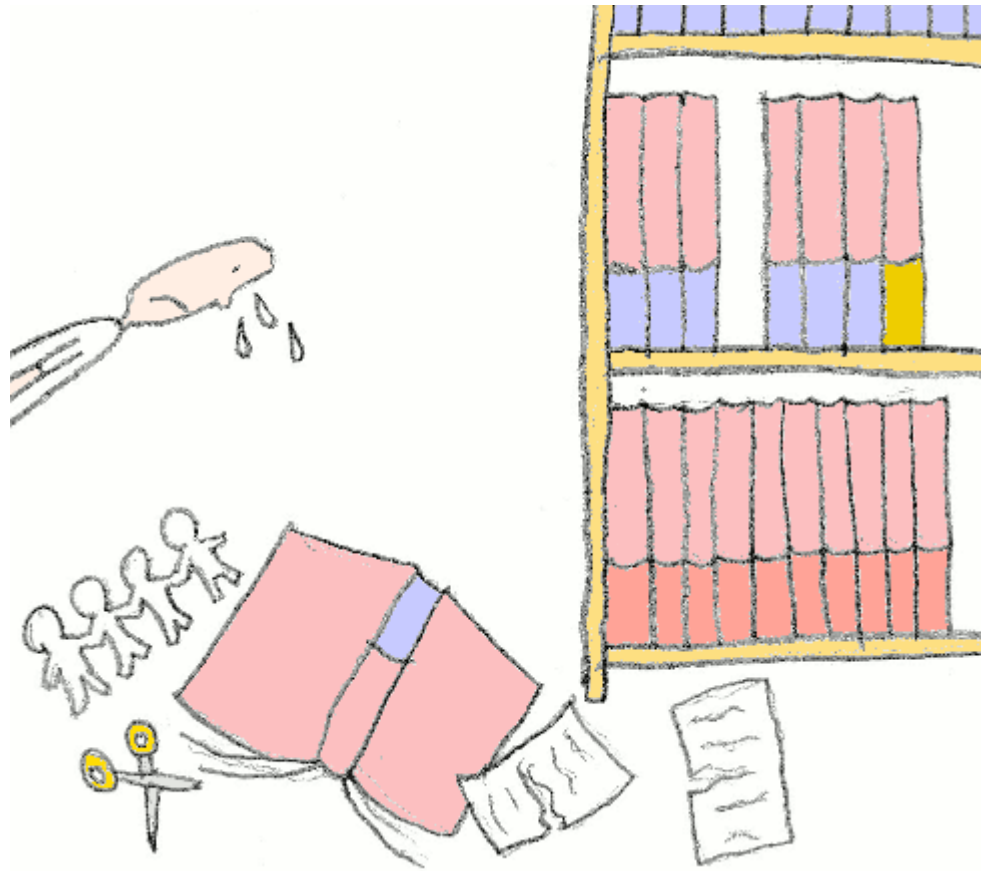
I never understood why *Encyclopaedia Britannica* had a volume called the *Propaedia*. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out what the *Propaedia* was for. I think it was just for some professors to show off how smart they were.

Dictionaries were also adept at getting ru, but at least those usually had only one volume. In 8th grade, my homeroom teacher's dictionary got accidentally dropped in the toilet. People stuck Gulf War stickers all over the pages of the dictionaries in high school. When I was very young, we had a children's dictionary full of colorful drawings. I don't ever remember seeing it not all ripped to shreds, or even still having its cover. I was also once told that we used to have a pink dictionary but it had mysteriously disappeared. We set up a big manhunt for it, even though I couldn't remember ever having it.

I once mistakenly left a *World Almanac* in the freezer. It didn't ruin it though.

Also when I was very young, we had several old books at home that were actually elementary school textbooks. One of my favorite stories in the books was about a little dog named Checkers who chewed up a library book. I also remember borrowing a humorous children's book from the library about a boy who had a dog who ate his map collection.

Stories of encyclopedia sets being wasted by missing volumes are stunningly hard to find on Google these days. If you search for related phrases, you'll mostly just find people selling whole sets. I usually have better luck with DuckDuckGo and Yandex now, because Google has undergone a reactionary counterrevolution that elevates established websites and media outlets and censors participatory sites.



Don't fall in love with PayPal... 'Cause they'll always take you in...

Wipe that smirk off your face, PayPal.

I had a PayPal account a long time ago, but PayPal's incontinence led me to close that account and set up an account with a competitor instead. Not long after, this competitor abandoned the business, so I said to myself, "I'll go back to *Sesame Street*!" Except I actually went back to PayPal.

Just days ago, something poopy happened. I won a small sum of money in a class action lawsuit, and this award was slated to be placed in my PayPal account. In fact, PayPal sent me an e-mail telling me how to collect it. But when I tried logging on to PayPal, I found my account had been closed. But it didn't come up with a message saying it been closed. It was as if my account had never even existed.

PayPal never sent me a message when it was closed—so I don't know *why* it was closed. Granted, I didn't use it that much, because I didn't have many reasons to. When people placed money in my account, I expected it to be safe and sound until I needed it, so I only took money out of it periodically. Posts on the unambiguously public Internet say PayPal always informs customers of account closures. But it didn't. According to these posts, PayPal closes your account if you don't use it for 2 years. If you have money in it, PayPal will try to send you the money. If you don't have a deliverable address, it will send the money to your state of residency—unless that's unavailable, in which case they inexplicably send it to Delaware. I'm sure I used my account within the past 2 years, and I'm pretty sure there was a little bit of money in it. Maybe they sent it to Joe Biden by mistake and he hid it under his record player.

One website says that if your account is closed for engaging in banned activities and you can't recover your money, you may sue PayPal.

A commenter on a message board says they got an e-mail from PayPal saying their account was yanked, but no reason was provided. At least they got an e-mail, which I didn't get. Then PayPal said it would hold this customer's money for 180 days and not let them access it. A respondent says PayPal sometimes takes—rather, steals—customers' money when this happens.

After all this biperoony, I got a new account on PayPal just to see if I could. Then I was able to collect my settlement money. But I'm not allowing people to just put money in this account, because I'll lose it all if PayPal pulls my account again. I'm essentially abandoning this account now that I got my lawsuit dough.

For decades, consumer rip-offs have been piling up like logs, and we try to cover 'em all! Whether it's defective electronics, bad services at stores, the Democratic Party, or websites like PayPal, we put our lives on the line exposing these things to keep you informed! It's a death defying life I lead, I take my chances.

Wikippee-pee poo-poo

There has long been an effort to fill Wikipedia with discredited establishment narratives, like when it claimed constitutional rights are not supposed to apply in the District of Columbia because it's not a state. Recently I noticed that Wikipedia calls chiropractic medicine "pseudoscientific"—which is not exactly an unbiased statement.

Lately I've also noticed that even some Wikipedia coverage of topics that are not controversial at all is an unintelligible goo. This section in an entry about a Chattanooga radio station made my IQ drop by 50 points...

“The station became WSKZ in August 1978 in which they were formerly co-owned with their nearby AM station WGOW during its early years but by 1981 the station became a Top 40/CHR format in which WSKZ is the only FM radio station in Chattanooga that broadcast a fully-fledged Top 40/CHR station. Throughout the mid 1980's unlike most Top 40 stations WSKZ is partially rock 40 typed leaned. The station formerly began competing against a new Top 40/CHR station WBDX in 1989, WSKZ continued their run as a Top 40/CHR station until 1992 when they returned to simulcasting WGOW after being a Top 40/CHR station to Chattanooga for 14 years. Then after 12 incredible years of playing rockin' hits WSKZ has decided to transformed from their highly successful Top 40/CHR format into their current Classic Rock format in 2000.”

Almost everything in that section is either incomprehensible, factually wrong, or contradictory. I learned more about the station from just driving through Chattanooga in 1991 than I would from that paragraph. But I bet that if I corrected the article and made it readable, my edits would be reverted for “vandalism.”

It reminds me of the rants on Topix about board games. (“Hasbro ruined classic board games like Operation nowadays. Why Hasbro??”)

Copyright © 2021. All rights reserved.