

The Last Word™

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Wake up and smell the coffee...before someone steals it!

Let the Great Late Debate rage on!

Our community of loyal admirers professes varying stances on how shoplifters should be viewed. Are shoplifters just plain old criminals? Or are they charming Robin Hoods who fight a corrupt system like the outlaw heroes of 1970s TV and movies? Are they a bane of small business, or are they a bane of Big Business?

It appears as if some people are unable to improve their circumstances in life without going rogue. They're the lucky ones, because the rest of us are out of luck no matter what we do.

On a recent Tuesday, I was an eyewitness to a man cutting his cost at Kroger the unconventional way! I bought some goodies at the friendly neighborhood Krogie-Wogie, and as I was in the checkout lane, I saw something rather entertaining.

The checkout lane next to the one I was in was not open, and there was a heavy, yellow chain across it. Naturally, a man who was about 60 years old swaggered through the closed checkout lane carrying a huge can of store brand coffee and a pack of cigarettes. He climbed over the chain and bolted out the door!

The man had stolen the cigarettes and the coffee! He thieved them. He pilfered them. He purloined them. He swiped them. He probably would have bubbled with them, except they weren't gum. He probably went, "Stealstealsteal!" as he helped himself to these items.

As the man walked away with an amazing \$25 in prizes, he vanished into the afternoon haze. He did not appear to be a famous person, so unfortunately this is not a celebrity scandal. Movie critic Rex Reed was once accused of shoplifting a Peggy Lee CD from a record store. The charges were later dropped. Reed said that a few days after the incident, the singer sent him her entire catalog of CD's. (Also, Rex Reed is not the same person as Rex Smith. One day, I got in an argument with a family member about who sang "You Take My Breath Away." I knew it was Rex Smith, but they kept insisting it was Rex Reed.)

Oap springs eternal

The oaptag lecture was often imitated but never duplicated! Abusing the laser printer in community college to print out the Def Leppard and Hulk Hogan fan sites pales in comparison. So does the time in 6th grade when we had to waste a whole pack of file cards by writing an abbreviation for a chemical element on each one. Perhaps the closest runner-ups to the oaptag controversy were the pink construction paper incident and the time a number got scrawled on each sheet of a Scribble Pad.

But what about when we're subjected to a lecture about wasting paper or similar materials after we were essentially required to do so? It's entrapment!

One time in 2nd or 3rd grade, a teacher assigned us a project that involved very cheap, thin paper. She warned us about how thin the paper was as she held up a sheet of it. She said that if we accidentally tore a sheet, she would make us pay a fine. If she didn't want us tearing paper, why did she have us use such thin paper? Let's use some logic here!

My 5th grade teacher—the same one responsible for the oaptag speech—once assigned us a project that used aluminum foil, which also rips very easily. (This was before kids at school kept rolling foil into little balls and eating them.) I accidentally ripped my sheet of foil. And did I ever hear about it!



I thought the teacher was going to get out her “board of education”! She wouldn’t let me continue working on this project and lectured me that I had wasted priceless foil. But later she relented.

I studied art when I was a high school sophomore. One of my projects was to paint a cardinal on a sheet of thick paper. One of my classmates walked past when I was working on it and gave his own suggestion on something I should add to my painting. “Make a piece of bubble gum,” he said, pointing at my work. So I dipped my paintbrush in some pink paint and painted a small square that just floated in the sky above the cardinal. I think this was the same project where I kept cleaning the brush in a cup of water, making it murky with paint, and our teacher said, “You’re ruinin’ your water there!” The magic word! I thought I was *supposed* to “ruin” the water. When you’re assigned to paint a painting, you need to clean the brush when you use a different color of paint.

Biddle gibzz!

Putting on a game face

There’s lots of creative ways to ruin perfectly good board games. You might use the thimble from a Monopoly game to replace your dental fillings and accidentally swallow it. You might lose your Aggravation marbles throwing them down a mall escalator to trip up the thief who snatched your Waldenbooks bag. A deluxe Scrabble board with a turntable makes a good graduation cap. The Risk pieces that represent armies are easily confused with Alpha-Bits.

The magic word—*ruin*—is used liberally in this article, so keep your eyes peeled! Another term you’ll see a lot in this article is *brand new*. *Brand new* and *ruin* are a bad combination.

A thread on the public Internet posted in 2011 reveals a new way to destruct board games. It’s not clear even what game it was, but it looks like it might have been related to *Star Wars*. A commenter claimed that they “ruined a good game” by laminating the board with one of those clear lamination sheets they sell at office supply stores. After 20 years, the sheet yellowed. “The game is a total loss,” the commenter lamented.

In another thread, someone said their kids opened the board of a prized board game the wrong way and tore the board in two. Another user said a former lover got drunk during a game of Risk and threw up all over the board. A Battlestar Galactica game was pulverized by beer. A brand new board game got completely decimated by hot tea, and another game was ruined by wine. Still another time it was coffee, and another time Coke. An *All My Children*-themed game was ruined by a spilled Caesar. Another user said they won’t play board games when there are open beverages on the table: “We explain it that if you ruin someone’s expensive shit by putting your drink where we’ve told you not to, you are replacing it, even if someone else knocks it, because we are all in the mindset of not having a drink on the table to begin with.” A teenager threw a tantrum during a game of Monopoly because she was losing, so she threw a banana across the room and onto the board.

Another commenter in that thread said they had a pal who won some priceless Magic: The Gathering cards at a major tournament. Not long after, an acquaintance placed his 32-ounce Big Gulp soda from 7-Eleven atop one of the most valuable cards for 4 hours: “Card was completely ruined.”

A group of players decided to turn Operation into a drinking game. If you set off the buzzer, you had to take a drink. You can see where this is headed, because Operation requires good motor skills—which got progressively worse as people drank more. It was a vicious cycle. One of the players ended up drinking so much that he threw up all over the brand new board.

A different board game was ruined because a cat released diarrhea all over the board. Another was demolished when a pipe burst above the table—which stuck the cards together and made the board fall apart. A sparkling new board game was destroyed when an entire pizza with extra sauce slid out of a box and landed face-down on it. Another commenter in that thread said they brang a brand



new game to a restaurant to play. A co-worker showed up and began playing it with them. She then mysteriously dozed off and fell ill. As she was getting back up, she vomited all over the game: “The board game was (obviously) completely ruined; we just got a jumbo sized trash bag from the restaurant and shoved everything in with the help of some dish towels.”

One person laid hulk to a brand new game by bursting out laughing while playing, causing Sprite to shoot out her mouth and nose and all over the game.

Image is nothing, obey your thirst – for ruining board games!

A person pooped on the floor at Oxford

Let’s talk pee and poo!

This zine has experienced a decades-long backlog in toilet stories, because I’m just one man, and I don’t have the mental bandwidth to process them all. The *Kentucky Post* or *Fortune* could have hired a whole staff just for toilet stories – but chose not to. I can’t afford to hire a toilet staff – but I try to cover toilets anyway.

You know bathroom items are popular because recently someone posted on a radio-related website that he once worked at a station that was 92.3 on the FM dial, and one time during the top-of-the-hour ID, he read it over the air as “ninety-poo point pee.” Even better, that was back when FM was mostly a highbrow medium, so think of all the community “leaders” who got to hear that!

Let’s bip on over to England’s prestigious University of Oxford. News reports lately have spoken of a “phantom pooer” who left a “huge turd” on a bathroom floor. It took place in a freshman housing building. An e-mail from a school official criticized the “repulsive behavior” of someone who went “beyond the bounds of what could be considered reasonable.”

A news article said “human poo was smeared across the seating, walls and floor of a shower, and that upon inspection ‘it became clear that the shower had been used as a lavatory.’ ”

All the students who live in that building have been threatened with the collective punishment of a heavy fine because of the unchecked poopery in the beethoom.

After the feces was discovered, someone posted anonymously on a student confession webpage that they had “followed through on a fart.”

This came a few months after someone kept defecating in sinks in the women’s restroom at a British Airways training hub at Heathrow Airport.

In 2019, students at various Oxford colleges reported mysterious piles of shit just laying around various places. One student found “a wrapped shit” in a stairwell. He urged campus graybeards to “get rid of it.” In another incident, poo was found atop a stack of copies of the student science magazine. In 2018, someone peed in the library.

Maybe someone will drop their glasses in the toilet.

Weathering the storm of lost media

Lost media is a very real and serious problem.

If it bleeds, it leads, which is one reason we’re bombarded with crisis after crisis (but no solutions). But sometimes it’s too easy to overlook climate catastrophes. Last July, many folks were still fighting old, settled battles, and they utterly missed the fact that unprecedented flooding was ravaging eastern Kentucky. In recent years, rural America has faced weather disasters as deadly as many overseas wars. In addition to the loss of lives and homes, this historic flooding threatened many irreplaceable cultural items. This was a sad episode that continues to yield reports of staggering damage.

Appalshop – an arts and media center in Whitesburg – suffered many devastating losses. Appalshop’s radio station WMMT-FM was heavily damaged by the floods. (Some years back, prisons and jails banned inmates from listening to WMMT because it aired some rap music. Prison officials



were even worse than the “no rap” hall monitors who dominated the American radio industry in the early 1990s.) But the flood damage at Appalshop wasn’t limited only to over-the-air equipment. The *Lexington Herald-Leader* recently reported on some of the other losses.

These losses are significant, and should be taken seriously. Among them was a brand new motion picture film scanner that Appalshop had just purchased to digitize films and recordings. A National Endowment for the Humanities grant had been used to buy this scanner, and now it’s a total loss, as it was submerged in mud by the flooding.

It isn’t only devices such as this that were destroyed, but also priceless items in Appalshop’s archives that can never be replaced. The archives filled a climate-controlled vault on the building’s first floor. Floodwaters rushed into the vault, and the water was 7 feet deep. Thousands of historic items were underwater—including film reels, photo negatives, recordings, books, sheet music, and musical instruments.

The center’s lead archivist said some of the negatives “are just gone.” The *Herald-Leader* said some items “are irrevocably damaged.” Heroic efforts are being made to save the rest of the archives, but this will cost millions of dollars and take many years. Many recordings and videotapes were shipped to restoration experts. The center tried to dry many items at its outdoor pavilion. Waterlogged books were placed in bags in a cold storage truck. Some negatives and videos are being stored in freezers, and some recordings are being kept in a rented building with a dehumidifier constantly running. Film reels have to be stored a certain way until they are cleaned, but they will degrade beyond repair if left that way for too long.

Luckily, many audio reels have already been saved before they could grow mold. The *Herald-Leader* article also includes a link to donate to Appalshop’s recovery efforts: <https://appalshop.salsalabs.org/AppalshopGeneralGiving>.

It wasn’t just Appalshop that was damaged. The newspaper reported that a building across the street that housed the Appalachia Media Institute was “irreparably ruined.” This too is a serious matter. July’s flooding isn’t even the only disaster to wipe out irreplaceable media. When the World Trade Center was destroyed on 9/11, the world lost a treasure trove of one-of-a-kind photos documenting John F. Kennedy’s presidency.

Time takes a toll on unique works. I remember a TV segment by Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert about early movies being lost, usually because the only known copy deteriorated over time. Wikipedia even says over 75% of films from the silent movie era “have perished.” In addition, half of American films with sound from 1927-50 are lost. Early films were often made of materials that would spontaneously combust. One film in the 1970s was so graphic that moviegoers often stole the theater’s copy after seeing it, and no complete copy is known to exist. Projector operators at some theaters also edited out parts of the movie while it was being shown.

Art and culture are supposed to last.

Super Bubble can collect Social Security now

Super Bubble! I want to talk about Super Bubble!

I seldom chomped this bubble bustin’ brand of gum, because other brands were more readily accessible. But Super Bubble was once offered as a prize in specially marked boxes of Cocoa Puffs, Count Chocula, and other popular cereals. When I was 10, we built a new bedroom on our house and moved the den into the old bedroom. One of the first things I remember about the new den was seeing a hilarious TV commercial for Cocoa Puffs in which people bubbled big, using the Super Bubble that came as a prize. (Real estate costs were much lower then, so working families in small cities adding a room to their home wasn’t completely out of the question.) Folks at the time used to say Super Bubble tasted of that flavored stuff that the dentist used to clean your gnashers.

Later, George W. Bush chewed Super Bubble during his temper tantrums in which he locked himself in his office. When YouTube came along, one of the first videos ever posted there was titled “Blowing a super bubble with Super Bubble.” It included a person bubbling.

Now, as bubble gum poppin’ people continue to bombard the public Internet, they’ve regaled the world with what they consider to be some of the saddest news in years. According to legend, Super



Bubble has now been “retired” by its manufacturer.

It’s “retired”? Can it collect Social Security now?

But there are conflicting reports. Another source says Super Bubble is only discontinuing flavors other than standard pink. After all, why would any brand of bubble gum—especially one that has been around since 1946—be discontinued now? The 2020s so far have seen a comeback in public bubbling, so beegum should be huge business. Bubble gum enjoyed a spike in popularity in the 1930s because the Great Depression made bubble gum busting the only affordable pastime. It’s the same in the 2020s: Most recreational facilities have been closed for 3 years, so the only amusement people have is to skip around town blowing bubs.

On the other hand, many brands of beegum have disappeared during times when public bubbling was far more prevalent than now. When was the last time you saw Swell or Tidal Wave? Bubble gum can be a cutthroat business!

Is the loss of Super Bubble completely devastating for the sport of bubble gum blowing? For many bubblers, Super Bubble wasn’t their go-to brand, as other brands were more easily available. It might not have even ranked in the top 5, though it had to have come close, because—as with most products in recent years—brands have been retired much faster than new brands have been introduced. It’s called monopoly. Even 30 years ago, I had an assignment for mass media class in college that showed that, while there was a growing number of different formats for radio stations, there were fewer and fewer ways in which they were being implemented. The professor noted there were fewer mass media companies than before.

Maybe someone will start a new brand of bubble gum, and you’ll laugh again!

Today’s chemistry sets are out of their element

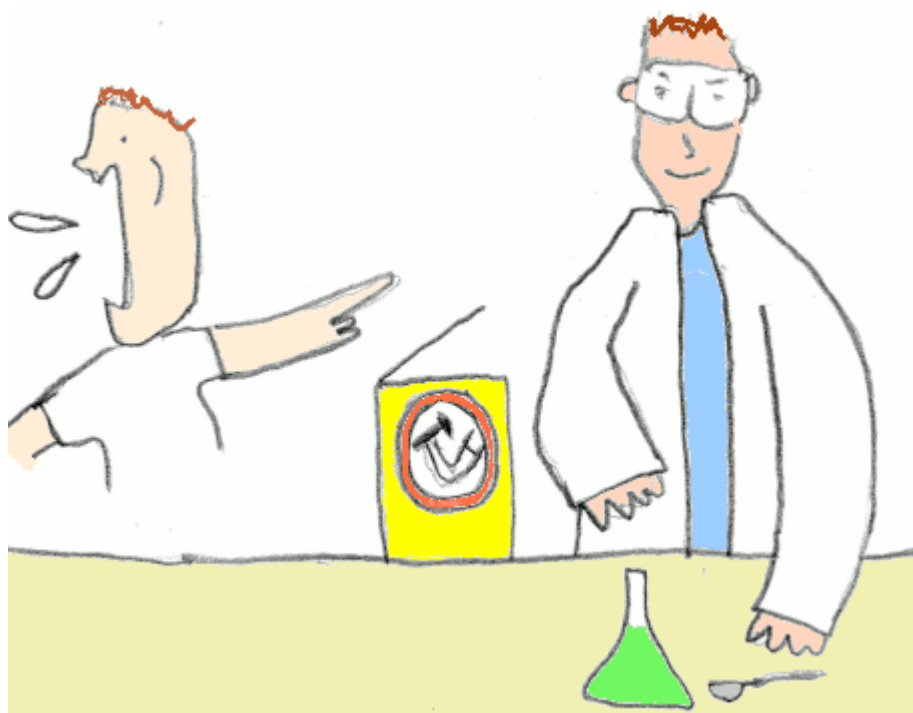
Remember chemistry sets? They ruled!

Chemistry sets used to be marketed as children’s toys. A lot of people I know who are my age still talk about how they or someone in their family or neighborhood had one. Kids would don white lab coats and goggles, pretend they were great scientists, and start mixing away! The family’s best silverware would end up caked with melted lumps of chemicals that could never be removed, as spoonfuls of chemicals were heated over burners. (Hopefully it wasn’t the same chemical I found hardened on a spoon I once loaned to neighbors.)

Products resembling chemistry sets began being marketed as toys in probably the 19th century, though wealthy adults with lots of time on their hands enjoyed playing with chemistry kits even earlier. Sets featuring radioactive chemicals, cyanide, and glassblowing equipment were available in the 1950s.

Chemistry sets remained a huge business even after federal laws and agencies put new regulations in place to improve their safety. Even an episode of *Webster* in which the title character accidentally burned down the apartment using a defective chemistry set didn’t blunt interest in these toys. That was before I made my own chemistry set by dumping poisonous nickel sulfide in a drain at school when I was in 8th grade.

But now you can’t get a decent chemistry set even if your navel depended on it. What the crap happened? In the 1980s, our rulers became highly paranoid about drug production. Later, they were



obsessed with terrorism. They thought there was a drug pusher or a terrorist hiding under every bed. They were allies of Big Pharma, yet they called everyone else drug dealers.

We understand why regulations and laws were enacted to ensure toy safety. But that's different from destroying an entire product line because of irrational fears of terrorism and drugs. Chemistry sets were usually marketed to kids who were at least big enough to reach their older brother or sister's cigarette lighter that they kept atop their 8-track collection, and I'm sure that by the 1970s there were already regulations to prevent chemistry kits from being much more dangerous than that.

These days, chemistry sets usually consist only of the type and amount of chemicals needed for just one project. Even some of the sets that are ostensibly like the ones we recall from our youth get terrible reviews. One buyer said a volcano that came with a set stained his countertop. Purchasers of another set said the acid injured their eyes, and others said they found vials of chemicals broken and spilled when they got it. Even a mega set that cost hundreds of dollars got bad reviews because it didn't include the needed chemicals and because a child cut his hand on glass that came with the set. One set's idea of a chemistry project was to fold a piece of paper and wave it in the air to listen to the sound it made. Another project that came with this set was basically the same as shaking a soft drink can and opening it. Another kit had projects requiring sand—which was not included. Landlocked Midwesterners noted that they had no place to get sand. Another experiment required a fountain pen—like you're George Washington. At least 4 reviewers of this set said the litmus solution bottle was empty.

Other sets are really just small magic kits that don't really emphasize chemistry. One of them was apparently recommended by NBC's *Today*, so that figures. Other sets don't do anything except make perfume. Others are really just cooking sets, as they only make cookies or candy shaped like cartoon characters.

Nowadays, people might have better luck getting instructions for real chemistry projects online and scrounging up many of the chemicals they need at home or a grocery store. But these websites have been the target of government censorship.

Add chemistry sets to the long list of things that have declined in this fine land over the past 40 years.

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