

# The Last Word™

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## I didn't go on a luxury cruise

It was the trip of a lifetime—and you didn't go!

Recently, I actually had a chance to go on a luxury cruise to the Caribbean and Central America. You read that right. Me—who probably had the most modest background of anyone at my high school—on a luxury cruise. Isn't that ridiculous? But I stayed home instead. Why? Money! You know, that green stuff. The price of this cruise would have grazed 4 digits. I could have scrounged up enough dough for it, except I'll need this money in the unlikely event that I live longer than another year or two.

And make no mistake, it was a *luxury* cruise. Some would say a \$1,000 cruise is not a luxury cruise. But trust me, it is. For me, not dying is a luxury.

Besides, think of the damage a luxury cruise would do to my working-class image and pride. If \$1,000 in free money crashed through my ceiling, I wouldn't spend it on a luxury cruise. I might use it to fix the resulting hole in the ceiling, but class consciousness is too important for me to waver on. Abandoning principles is what MoveOn, the ACLU, and the Democratic Socialists of America do. If someone waves enough money at these groups, their stated values go out the window. The DSA even threatened to expel "ultraleft" figures. The DSA has the word *socialists* in its name but is not recognizably socialist. Gee, where have we heard that before?

According to legend, a passport would not have been necessary to visit foreign countries on this cruise. This is good, because I don't have a passport, and it takes months to get one. But if I wanted to drive across the bridge to Windsor on my Detroit trip, I would have needed a passport just to return to the U.S., because Bush's totalitarianism still hasn't been reined in.

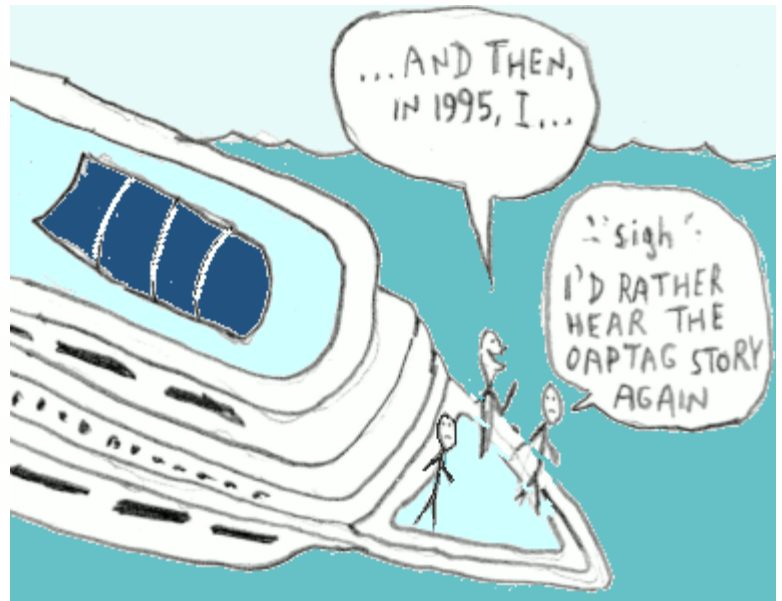
On the other hand, is a cruise really the best kind of vacation? It sounds like cruises mostly consist of getting seasick and listening to other tourists' boring life stories. It wouldn't be so bad if these coddled travelers talked about more interesting things like eating their own navel lint or how they had a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who got mad because some kids used the school's expensive posterboard to draw Strawberry Shortcake.

It doesn't help that many countries in Central America are military dictatorships—or were until very recently. Some of these regimes were installed by the CIA.

So how do we learn about the countries along these cruises? By...bipping! Seriously, we can learn a lot from footage posted on the public Internet. I watched a batch of videos from Belize. I noticed most of the traffic signs in Belize look exactly the same as in the United States. Many stop signs there use a different font, but many use the exact same font and lettering dimensions we use. A vast majority of stop signs in the U.S. look identical—down to the last detail. If you go over to Covington, you may still see a few Bush-era stop signs with that bad font the city used back then, but this is not the nationwide norm. Many stop signs in Belize are indistinguishable from the U.S. standard.

Road signs in Belize also use U.S. units of measurement—which kerpows a gaping cavern through the complaints of the bombastic grumps who have fretted nonstop for the past 50 years that the U.S. is the only country that doesn't use the metric system. At least this decade has given them some new material to be wrong about.

Some cruises enable you to see the Panama Canal. An invocation from circa 1989 said, "May



every cough drop in the world melt and drain into the Panama Canal!” That incantation must mean the Panama Canal in New Mexico, not the Panama Canal in Panama, as photos of the latter do not seem to show any melted glop therein – or vapors rising from it as in the commercial.

Nobody is ever going to get to see everything there is to see in the world. It’s like how so many books are published that you’ll never read them all. Visiting things that are closer is cheaper and easier than traveling around the globe. For example, the gum wall in Greenville, Ohio, is a fairly simple day trip from here. Even on a long vacation, you probably wouldn’t see as many hilarious things as you would at the Circle K up the street in a single day. But the method of travel also matters. I was happy to spend hundreds of dollars on an incredible road trip that was stretched out to include Washington and Oregon. I’d spend just as much to visit Central America if I could drive there and if I knew there wouldn’t be any passport tussles.

But a *cruise*? A *luxury* cruise???

## Short-term rentals keep getting ru

You may remember those heady times around the turn of the decade in which these pages were rife with stories of vacation rentals offered through platforms like Airbnb and Vrbo getting decimated by guests. As the travel biz recuperates from the partially self-inflicted shambles of the early 2020s, we’re back for more (as Ratt would say)!

A few months ago, the owner of a short-term rental posted a video on TikTok showing the damage foisted upon it by guests. Guests scribbled all over a door with markers, smashed a lamp and a big screen TV, left a bottle of antifreeze laying in the living room, burned a bed, and ripped out drawers. On the wall, they wrote, “Rome smells like poop.”

An Airbnb in Amsterdam got roodledy-doodledy too. The tables were covered with cocaine. The wool carpet was full of stains and burns. The sofa had been peed on. A photo showed a big shit streak on the rug.

Another Airbnb owner said guests “ruined one of our good hand towels and matching wash cloth.” The magic word! The host’s husband said the guests should have to pay the \$40 cost of the whole set, since you can’t buy these cloths individually. Someone replied saying guests “ruined” their brand new towels and bed sheets with benzoyl peroxide. This conjured memories of the Oxy commercials where the guy with the deep voice said, “Zit, this is it!” (The voiceover man was actor W.B. Brydon.) Another respondent said they charged a family \$80 for “ruined towels” and a torn leather couch.

A woman gave a bad review to an Airbnb rental where she never even stayed. However, her fiancé and his friends had stayed there. They left bags of garbage laying around and stole bottles of liquor that had been hidden about the unit.

One Airbnb owner found that a guest had smeared peanut butter all over the rental.

The owner of a short-term rental in Tampa found his unit utterly demolished after a renter threw a party that drew over 200 people. The owner produced a detailed list of the destruction. It included a broken antique table, a wasted backyard “due to being trampled upon”, a broken lamp, and lost silverware “now making incomplete set.”

A historic house in Michigan usually used for religious retreats was rented out on Airbnb. Guests left it a wreck over Christmas. They left the home filled with cigarette butts, marijuana, beer, soda, “half-eaten candy bars”, vomit, urine, mucus, broken toys, and other wastage bastage. Someone clogged the toilets with towels and smeared toothpaste all over the toilets. A photo revealed Goldfish crackers all over the floor alongside a fork and bags of trash.

Stuff got destructamundo. There’s no doubt about it!



## A capitol crime (a blast from the past)

Much merriment resulted when we found that an unknown U.S. senator placed toilet paper all over a toilet seat in the Russell Senate Office Building and peed all over it. But restroom mischief seems to be an even longer and prouder tradition in state legislatures.

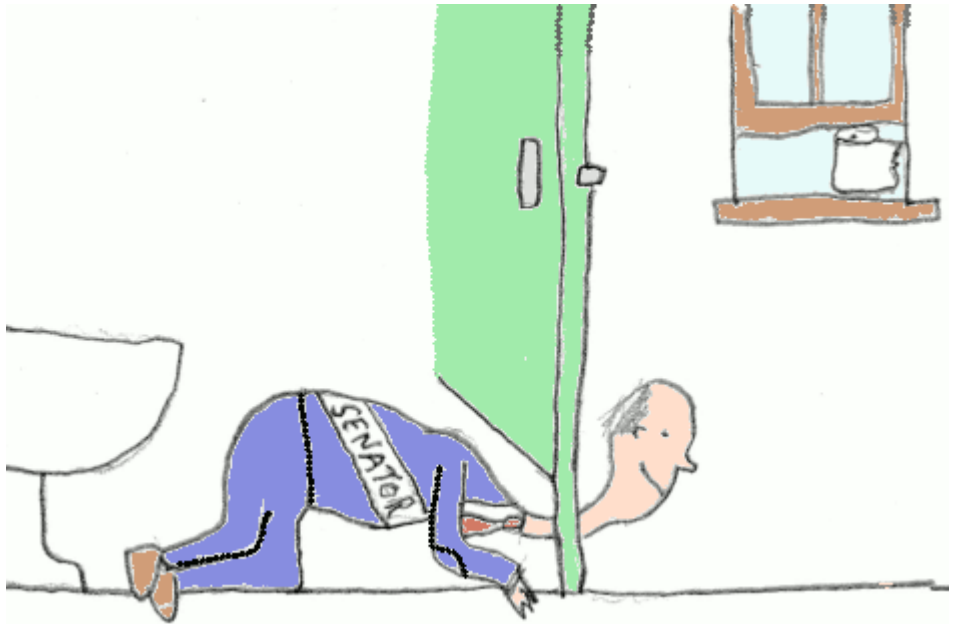
Let's take a jaunt back to February 1990. Michael Bolton, Tina Turner, and the Cover Girls ruled the pop radio airwaves. The 49ers had just blasted to another Super Bowl win. Signs were in the air that my Brossart days were sputtering to a close. And one Saturday, we decided to drive up to Frankfort. There wasn't any particular reason.

We weren't there to meet with lawmakers about whatever idiotic legislation was barreling our way. We were visiting Frankfort just because we could. Because it bips, you might say.

We visited the Kentucky State Capitol and found some hilarity in action. The uproariness ensued when I had to use the men's room. The first thing I noticed was that the window in the restroom was propped open with a perfectly good roll of toilet paper. Any genius could have just let it unfurl out the window of the capitol. Then I found that someone had locked a stall door and crawled out underneath – the same trick you see on elementary school campuses far and wide. For anyone to use the stall, they'd have to crawl under the door.

*A state legislator apparently did that!*

Some kid in grade school got caught red-handed by a teacher doing that once. I forget what his reason was for pulling this stunt, but I know it was funny. I think it was "There's pee on the lock" or something like that.



## A Debbie Harry look-alike bubbled while roaches crawled all over her head

You know how you buy bubble gum and you blow bubbles with it? YouTube knows. Ever since YouTube began, people have been blowing bubs and posting it there.

Peep this vid...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIDIVwh0eIY>

Here a synopsis of that hilarious clip in case you're afraid the President of the Internet will fly out of your screen and ruin you. That video is one of many posted by a woman who strongly resembles Debbie Harry circa 2012. In that clip, she bubbles while roaches are scampering up and down her head and neck.

She has other videos where she puffs out mean bubs – with and without a side of roaches – but this is just a sample of the unabated bubble gum busting that populates YouTube.

## The music has magic! You know you can catch it!

Strum! Nerr nerr nerr nerr nerr! Dum-a-dum dum dummmmm! Nerr nerr nerr nerr nerr! Dum-a-dum dum dummmity dum! Nerr nerr nerr nerr nerr! Dum dum dum dummmmm! Dum dum dum. Vibraslap!

It's *Solid Gold*!

*Solid Gold* was a syndicated weekly TV series in the 1980s that featured popular music performers, Wayland Flowers's puppet Madame, and a whole lotta dancing! The *New York Times* said *Solid Gold* was "the pop music show that is its own parody", but much of the show actually was genuinely entertaining. This hour-long show had its own crew of professional dancers, and decent music acts often appeared. Yet much of *Solid Gold* was thoroughly ridiculous. When I was about 9 or 10, I regularly watched *Solid Gold* to see how ridiculous it could get.

Supposedly, there was an episode where Rex Smith sang "Shadows Of The Night" and kept grabbing his crotch. But what I recall is an installment in which Marilyn McCoo sang "Always Something There To Remind Me." This was memorable because the chorus featured this spacey keyboard sound that made me burst out laughing. Now it's on YouTube, and it's as hilarious as ever. It was in the episode dated June 25, 1983.

*Solid Gold* also had preposterous segments in which they'd go out and film people lip-synching or singing a song while they chewed bubble gum.

I remember how when the hosts introduced a musical act, they would say the performer was one of the most "talked about" acts out there. They didn't say if that was good or bad. It could be like how the time someone pooped on the floor at school was "talked about." And what were those big cylindrical things on the stage supposed to be? Giant ash trays?

When I was only 9 or 10, I didn't realize yet how risqué some of Madame's jokes were. And this was over-the-air TV—not cable. However, some jokes on the show were not risqué but cruel. I remember a comedian who appeared on the show and made a mean joke about Joe Cocker. I'm surprised Joe Cocker agreed to be on the show after that.

Most episodes included a top 10 countdown of the week's biggest hits. Where did they come up with their top 10? Apparently, early episodes used the *Radio & Records* chart, but the survey *Solid Gold* used when I watched was not *Radio & Records*. It was way off from any national chart I remember. Radio stations compiled their own surveys from local record sales and requests, and the *Solid Gold* countdown looks like it could have come from just one station or record store—not a nationwide sample. But if you looked at the closing credits very closely, you may have seen this fine print: "The ranking of hit songs contained in this program was compiled by the producers after reviewing standard industry sources." In other words, they probably just pulled it out of their asses. I'm sure some radio stations pulled their surveys out of their asses too, so there was likely some ass pulling somewhere in the chain of command.

Even some of the commercials that aired during *Solid Gold* were fair targets for ridicule. I remember the Stetson ad with the horses running around in the guy's hat. I made up a parody where the horses were running around in the toilet. I also made up a parody of a Wrangler jeans commersh where the big, tough cowboy walked into the saloon and shit his pants.

For several years, *Solid Gold* was a sensation! You'd go to a garage sale, and the person running it would be sitting in their garage with their tray full of money and their small portable TV, and they'd be watching *Solid Gold*! They weren't going to miss *Solid Gold* just to run a yard sale!



## Meet the box-eating chair!

Some of the funniest *Peanuts* strips involved Charlie Brown's battles with the Kite-Eating Tree. Not only was the kite ruined when it got tangled in the tree. It also seemed to slowly disappear. It had to go somewhere. But where? Similarly, my neighborhood when I was growing up had a Kite-Eating Power Line. A kite got caught in it one day, and it probably took 20 years before it was completely gone. But where did the pieces of it go in the intervening time frame? The kite simply vanished little by



little. The pieces could not be found.

And that's where our old friend Domino Rally comes in!

This toy is considered one of the all-time duds by many toy-related websites. Not Wikipedia though, after someone vandalized Wikipedia by essentially turning the entry on Domino Rally into an advertisement for it. A couple years ago, some galoot deleted the paragraph about how the dominoes were "ruined for good" when the snaps broke off, calling it "unencyclopaedic rubbish." That paragraph had been up for years, and it only took one dour windbag to delete it.

As you know, I had the basic Domino Rally set when I was growing up, and I lost interest in it precisely because of that flaw. It wasn't something I dwelled on. I just put the pieces in the box and stowed it safely under the green armchair in the den. Out of mind, out of sight (as the Models would say).

Except it wasn't so safe. For one thing, the toy was already pretty much in shambles after I had it for only a few weeks. For another, the chair was in a condition that posed grave danger to the box.

If you haven't figured it out from my past articles on this topic, the version of Domino Rally that I had was one that several websites say was from 1981. There were several versions that had the same group of people on the box but in slightly different poses. I think the one I had was the one with the bespectacled man in the middle, a boy at left, and a girl in a green shirt at right. It wasn't the narrower box where they were closer together, but the wider box with more muted smirks. The girl looks she's trying to force a smile, as if she knows that the domino layout they just spent an hour setting up is going to fail—or something is going to get broken. One website was selling this set for \$40—yes, \$40—and said it was in "previously loved shape", as some pieces appeared to be missing. I bet it wasn't "loved." I bet those pieces got broken when the toy was brand new, so its owner just stored it in their closet for 40 years with all their *National Geographic World* magazines and their U.S. map puzzle with Texas and Connecticut missing.

Armchairs don't last forever. One website said armchairs last only 7 to 10 years, but I know from experience that you're lucky if they last even that long. If the chair doesn't get covered with boogers first, the springs will break and poke through the fabric. After I put the Domino Rally under the green chair, I don't think anyone got it back out again until it was time to throw the chair away. Then the real hilarity began. We found that a broken spring had poked through the bottom of the chair and into the cardboard Domino Rally box. It had ground back and forth in the box lid, completely obliterating the face of the girl with the green shirt and forced smile. It was sort of like the Bunning Bomb, when we poked the wick of a smoke bomb through a photo of Jim Bunning on his congressional newsletter and lit it, which burned his face off.

The \$98.26 question is: Where did the pieces of the Domino Rally box that were carved out by the broken spring go? They just disappeared into thin air! It's like how pieces of Charlie Brown's kite couldn't be found after the tree ate it.

The pieces of the box weren't simply in a different position from before. They were gone completely.

This toy couldn't have been more than a few months old when we found it like that, but I'm pretty sure we just threw it away then. I'm guessing we got rid of the box-eating green chair in 1982. I



remember sitting in it while watching TV and hearing the springs crunch each time. This chair was also the subject of what I called “coaster reserve”, in which I would reserve the chair by placing a beverage coaster on it. (That’s something I haven’t thought about in 40 years.) I think we replaced it with the orange chair from the living room, which in turn was overthrown by a new blue chair – unless the blue chair displaced the yellow striped chair that I got ink on by playing catch with a felt-tip pen. After it was moved to the den, the orange chair was extensively emboogered over the years. I’ve lost track of our chairs after that, because we started going through armchairs and couches so quickly.

## Record fairs are getting warped

One of my pastimes seems to have been the target of a hostile takeover by bullies and spoilsports.

One day in my youth, I decided I would buy a bunch of records – mostly rock and pop. This pursuit later led me to attend a few record collecting conventions in this area. The men and women selling records at these events were very knowledgeable about recorded music, and some specialized in regional hits or certain types of music. They were winners in life. People at these gatherings were hard-working and knew how to enjoy themselves.

But there was one man who was an exception. I went to a great record convention in the early 1990s where a middle-aged attendee was seen lugging around a small battery-operated record player. It didn’t look like a turntable that I’d use to play a prized record that I wanted to keep in playable condition. It looked like a poorly built toy that used a spike from a golf shoe as a stylus. The man would grab records out of the bins, slap them on his turntable, slam the needle down, listen for a few seconds, and yank the needle back up. It would be great if we could always know what a record sounded like before we bought it, but all he was accomplishing was scratching the records all to hell and not buying them.

We overheard the man bragging to folks that he wasn’t interested in collecting records except for profit. He said his main interest was comic books. I’ve been stockpiling records ever since I first saved up my allowance to buy a Bonnie Tyler disc, but all this guy did was ruin other people’s records in search of a quick buck. I have nothing against comic books. Just this guy.

What he did is like if someone who only cares about records goes to a comic book convention, pulls all the comics out of their sleeves with their hands coated with hamburger grease, rips the covers when shoving them back into the sleeves, and doesn’t buy any of them.

This man was like the town bully. Something wasn’t right with him. But now the pastime of record collecting seems to have been taken over by people like this.

Some people are big into events, and there’s one coming up in a city not terribly far from here (not Cincinnati) where you can buy records *and* hear live music. The problem is that the annual event’s reputation has been shot to hell in the past few years. Contrast photos of the event from 2019 versus 2022. For one thing, the photos indicate that attendance was down by about two-thirds. For another, it has gone full-tilt loser. If the man with the record player is still out there, that’s where he’d be. If he could, he’d grab the live bands off the stage and place them on the turntable – like a Sit ‘n Spin.

Pictures from 2019 show everything skipping along splendidly. Crowds were cheering and happily pawing through crates of albums. But it looks like the only people who showed up in 2022 were about 20 incels.

Some will inevitably argue that the event was just trying to keep up with where the city was headed. The gathering is in one of these cities that has proven lately that it’s not as hip as it thinks it is. After all, that city is also where a teacher was fired for opposing the Iraq War. But if I went by the maxim that I should just follow where a town or county was headed, then this zine would have started out cheering the Gateway West land grab or dangerous nuclear power. In addition, the media in the city where the event takes place generally ignored the 2019 installment but hyped the laughable 2022 version as much as they dared. The reactionism of the local media is more proof that the town is not the outpost of progress it claims to be.



With the world's hard turn to fascism in the past few years, this event in 2022 seems to have been dominated by true believers. It looks like it wasn't just lip service—unlike some other events. It was the real fake deal.

I suspected Google was suppressing negative reviews of the 2022 event, but actually it looks like it was so poorly attended that there was nobody to review it. The show had the whole convention center to itself, and hardly anyone showed up. The convention center could have been used for something that would have attracted more people, such as the National Chewed-Up Ho-Ho Collectors' Convention, but instead it was tied up by something hardly anyone attended.

Record events now seem to be worse than other annual gatherings. Generally, car shows are nowhere near this bad. Your mileage may vary at comic book, sci-fi, and video game fairs, but there's some bright spots. Zine events seem to be doing decently. There were a couple of zine fairs that were disastrous self-parodies, but they were considered the laughingstock of the zine world, because zinesters are usually independent thinkers. Yet now there have been multiple record gatherings where Mr. Close 'n Play's pals have taken over. I'm sure not all record events have been destroyed like this, but the ones I'm aware of were. One of few things that might be worse is niche tech.

As for the event discussed in this article, maybe its former good reputation will come back—but I doubt it. Only dumb losers would allow the decline to continue—but only dumb losers would have allowed this downfall to happen in the first place. Many of us had a very romantic and benign view of humanity until a few years ago, but now we see the human species is full of backstabbers, control freaks, and drones. We don't see people in the positive light we once did, because now we know so many folks have a knife hidden behind their back. We can't sugarcoat it. All the spirit we once thought people had has turned out to be a lie.

Now—according to an article I read recently—it isn't just *events* that are gutted, but also the *actual collecting* of music. I always liked records better than CD's, because records had better sound quality *and* they were cheaper. But the piece I read says records are now more expensive than CD's, and gentrified soreheads are now buying and hoarding records just as a status symbol. If I couldn't easily and cheaply buy digital downloads, I think now would be the time for me to switch from records to CD's—just because CD's are becoming the *opposite* of a status symbol. As a bonus, CD's are easier than records to copy to MP3's for your digital library for personal use.

This is like if bubble gum blowing was ruined by people buying up all the bubble gum and letting it go stale at home while they didn't chew any of it.

## Parking meter smells a quarter

Parking meters might be a necessary evil. Like taxes, we might not like them, but they're supposed to be for the greater good.

Let's glide on over to Newport to inspect the parking situation there. Downtown Newport used to be the home of a fine public library. When I was a kiddo, just one quarter in the parking meter would last an entire library visit. You could swagger into the libe, get yelled at by the elderly librarian, devour a book, pick up a Bicentennial "Read On!" bookmark, fart a few times, bubble, and still have a few minutes left on the meter. Libraries had a nice smell back then, and the parking meter didn't wipe that smile away.

Sadly, the days of cheap parking in the area is gone. Gone into air of the thinnest sort.

Recently, we had to run some errands, and we stopped for lunchage at a restaurant in downtown Newport. The parking meter provided a rude surprise. We inserted a quarter, and it gave us all of...9 minutes.

*Nine minutes.*

This isn't just because of (whoosh...whoosh) inflation. Other cities don't have this problem. In Great Falls, Montana, 50 cents buys you an hour—which works out to a half-hour for only a quarter, a



much better barg. The soaring parking rates are a Newport thing.

Why? Maybe it would help matters if the city didn't give a property tax exemption to the massive luxury condo developments that are taking over.

You'd think small businesses would complain to the city about expensive parking rates driving away customers just so big developers can get free Toy Money to attract residents who don't use these businesses – and drive out residents who do.

## **Underpantsers still fighting, but they should try reading us**

Some lies hurt people. But some lies don't do anything except make the person uttering them sound like a jabbering buffoon.

We have to confront the fact that the authoritarian official response to COVID-19 was a deadly mistake. I can produce hundreds of pages of information to back up my stance, and I will stand by it. It's bad enough when people post negative reviews of businesses and public landmarks because people weren't wearing masks. But businesses that got bad reviews for requiring masks have also posted replies attacking reviewers.

I found one in which a business owner said a bad review was "basically an anti-masker rant." Anti-masker? You mean like almost everyone in the world was before 2020? Probably the only exceptions were the few people who still supported mask mandates after the vaccine came out. Since they still supported it after that, I can only assume they must have also supported it before anyone ever heard of COVID.

Their lies were the kind that did real harm to people. But these vacuous bullies are the type that if they don't get their way, they'll add new lies that will just cause humiliation to themselves. The lies that school officials started spreading about me in 6<sup>th</sup> grade were bad – and frankly ableist. But this became their bread and butter. The amount of energy they and their followers put into their campaign against me was breathtaking. Their crimes were actually harmful. But every so often, people like this lapse into prolonged periods of frustration in which they're not even good liars.

During these protracted phases, they make things up like they usually do, but the target of their new lies is someone who fears nothing from them. The person issuing the lies just ends up embarrassing themselves. They'll seriously claim something that displeases them is bad to a superlative degree, the worst of all like items that have ever existed anywhere in the history of the universe. The "facts" and statistics they use to back up this view are often completely made up. Their voice gets shriller as they repeat their claims. It's like online posts where certain words are in all capitals. If someone cites data contradicting them – data that is often in plain sight or even commonly known – they just say the source is biased or dishonest.

It is also during these frustrated stages when they're the biggest sore losers. Their fetishes for made-up statistics and paranoia come in handy for them in this regard.

They also blame entities who had absolutely nothing to do with the situation at hand. At the same time, they place loyalty in those who have done very little for them, just because they seem to be rivals of those who offended them. They then defend the subject of their loyalty against all critics, even when that entity does the same thing as whoever first offended them did.

It's also during these phases that they try to turn localized disagreements into items of widespread public interest. But nobody gives a shit about their goofy babblings, and when their complaints are ignored, they dig in. They also claim their stance has much more popular support than it really does.

This isn't something that people like this just recently started doing. Their ethical compass has been broken for years and years.

I'm not the only victim of their wrath. Many of us don't like it when those who try to rewrite history make us out to be the bad guys. It's utterly gonzo for them to lob specious attacks against those of us who cherish science, common sense, real world evidence, and bodily autonomy instead of authoritarianism.

Instead of going off half-cocked, the gentrified laptop incels and underpantsers and their elitist media cheering section should try actually reading what we've written. Reading would be a new experience for them.