

# The Last Word™

Issue #585

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## “Storefront flowers ruined my vacation,” says idiot

Summer! It turns me upside down! Summer, summer, summer! It's like a merry-go-round!

I've wasted most of June on personal projects, but in places that *have* a summer, it's summer! In the Northern Hemisphere, it's time for summer vacation! And if you're gonna ruin your vacation, you might as well do it in style. It can't be ruined by diarrhea or jury duty. It's gotta be something big!

A recent search on the public Internet yielded stories of vacations getting ruined all up by some of the biggest atrocities in the history of the universe. Here's the most shocking story of all. Are you ready for it?

There were too many big flower arrangements in storefronts.

Feel free to take a few days to recover from the shock.

This took place in the Long Island resort town of Sag Harbor, New York, and was listed on a webpage on vacation spots in the Northeast. Apparently, the article was poking fun at zillionaires who complain about everything. But an opulent tourist really did gripe about storefront flowers.

Someone grumbled that nearby East Hampton was being spoiled by either too many helicopters or too few helicopters. How can it be both? One vacationer said she refused to swim at the beach because there's sharks out there. Then what's the point of even visiting a beach town?

Officials in Montauk have whined that their own town has been ruined by people dancing and have begun raiding and fining restaurants that allow it. Just like *Footloose*.

Rich people complain. A lot.

I love it when people complain—as long as they have solutions. But the 1% offer wall-to-wall negativity—with no realistic remedies. Just bombast.

*USA Today* actually produced a video titled “How to handle an airline seatmate who refuses to comply with mask rules.” It features dramatic, spooky music. Yet there's no video titled “How to handle fellow TANK passengers who grab used wads of bubble gum off the floor of the bus and chew them.” That would have been handy when dealing with some of the slobs I went to high school with. As another example of *USA Today's* frenzied catastrophism, it ran an article on how to avoid arguments with unmasked strangers while on vacation. Believe it or not, that piece appeared in *June 2021*—after COVID had entered its endemic phase. Not April 2020. *June 2021*—the same month I visited Wind Cave, where we all crowded together barefaced on a National Park Service cave tour. An “etiquette consultant” quoted in the article warned of conflicts with “beachgoers who put their towel too close to yours” and restaurant customers who get up from their table without a mask.

Yep, I'm sure that's everyone's big worry when they go on a trip. Not weather or car trouble. Nope, everybody's biggest fear is that someone else might be using the beach.

Dear media: We get it. It's going to be 2020 forever, isn't it?

Imagine it's the late 1970s, and you've crammed your family into your Horizon to take them on



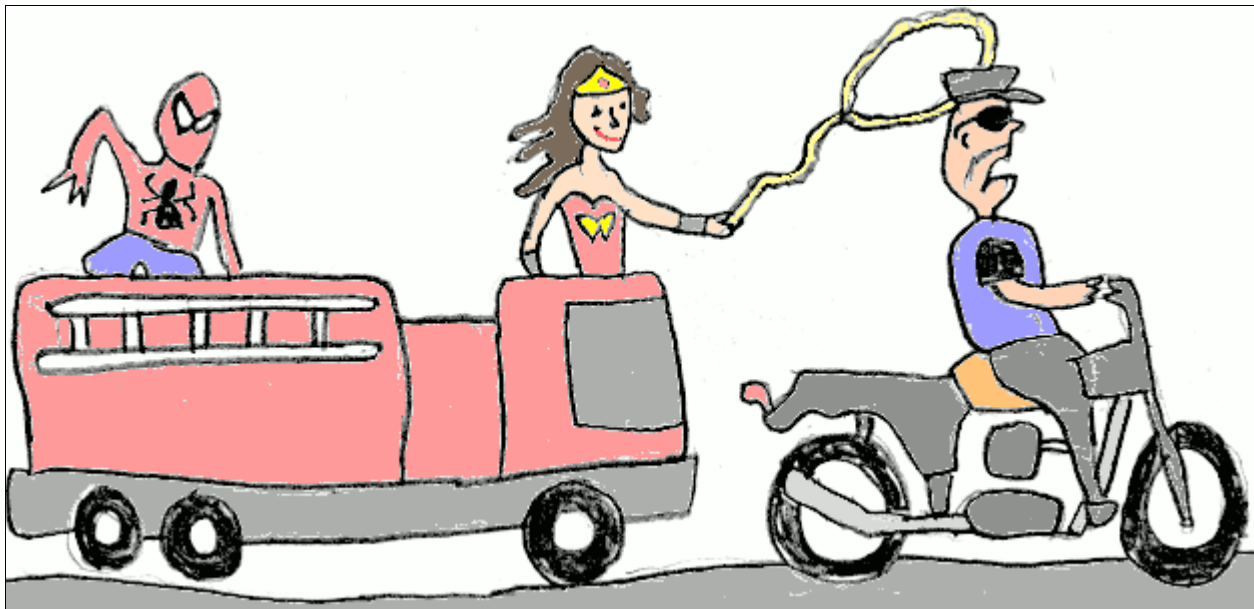
a nice vacation. On the way home, somewhere around Zanesville, you pull into a little diner for lunch. The eccentric waitress starts inexplicably talking about what a map of the U.S. would look like if we didn't have certain states—like Barry Goldwater's comment about sawing off the eastern seaboard. Then, out of nowhere, a patron sitting a few seats away yells at the server, "WEAR A DAMN MASK!!!!" Think of how ridiculous that is. That's the world of *USA Today*. They endorsed the Trump regime slashing Social Security too.

An online commenter complained that their sister brang her baby along on their big vacation, and the infant "ruined" the trip by screaming—as babies do.

Another groaned because it rained on 5 of the 7 days of their vacation. Only 5? My trips usually get more rain than that—even if the trip is shorter than 5 days! Another tourist threw a 3-day-long temper tantrum because a hotel where they stayed for one night didn't have a TV.

At least the Eliminati seemed to be tied up somewhere else that day.

## Trump ruined summer camp (a poopysm)



Some will accuse us of being a Republican zine, because we claim George W. Bush was worse than Donald Trump, and Democrats lately have been trying to rehabilitate Bush's shattered reputation—when these ghouls aren't closing or destroying schools. Longtime readers find any claim that we're a Republican zine to be laughable.

Accusing us of being a Republican rag is like how propellerheads say Jimmy Dore is right-wing because he's...left-wing. Or when Hillary Clinton said breaking up big banks would be racist.

Anybip, Trump once ruined the summer camp experience of 250 children by being an idiot.

Back in 2017, the leader of the free (?) world decided to take a big vacation. This happened to be right when a summer camp in New Jersey had planned a big event in which skydivers would dive from planes wearing comic book superhero costumes and surprise the kids. The problem was that Trump declared a no-fly zone within 30 miles of his private golf course. The camp was one-tenth of a mile inside this zone.

So the skydiving show that had been planned for months was canceled at the last minute. Hundreds of children sat in a field waiting for their surprise, and it never came. That was despite the fact that the FAA had already given clearance for the event. The FAA kept begging with Trump to relent, but he wouldn't budge.

The skydiving company ended up losing a huge amount of money to Trump's stupidity.

Instead of a skydiving show, camp staffers had to hastily go out and buy superhero costumes and arrange to borrow a fire engine from a local fire department to chase away staffers portraying outlaw bikers.

That's a poopysm!

## Broken calculators add up

I've had more calculators break or prematurely wear out than you can shake a stick at. I didn't abuse any of them, but they were no match for others' prying paws.

When I was about 3 or 4, I was so fascinated by calculators that my parents bought me a toy Mickey Mouse calculator. It had a drawing on it of the big-eared cartoon murine wearing a wizard hat and waving a wand. This device had a very distinct fragrance—as if a candy factory made an artificial feces flavoring.

This was a functional calculator, but it only went up to 6 digits. When I was in elementary school, I needed something more powerful. That was when I got my first calculator that wasn't a toy. It was a standard pocket calculator with a green LED display—not unlike a Speak & Spell. I still have it, and it still works, but it suffered a rough year when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at St. Joe's. We had to bring a calculator to school for math class. One of the usual suspects broke this calculator. I think they stole it out of my desk and threw it. It didn't work at all after that—until I was miraculously able to fix it. It may have just gotten a loose wire in the battery slot.

Also that year, I found a small, solar-powered calculator on the school parking lot. I started using it as my school calculator, because I didn't want my main calculator getting broken again. True to form, this device met its match one day when an adversary seized it from me, threw it on the parking lot, stomped on it, and slid around on the pavement with it under his shoe. Then he tore the metal back off of it and bent it in half. Sometime later, in English class, a student threw this piece of metal at me from across the room, and I threw it back. Naturally, I was the only one who got in trouble, as this inspired the infamous tirade from the principal—an aging nun—about “a bent, sharp piece of metal.”

At the disastrous Bishop Brossart High School, I had another small, solar-powered calculator. I didn't have it for very long when it got demolished at lunch one day. Some girl at my table was behaving like she was on drugs. She kept devouring big spoonfuls of chili or soup, acting like she was going to throw up all over the seats, and laughing uncontrollably about it. Finally, she grabbed my calculator and dismantled it.

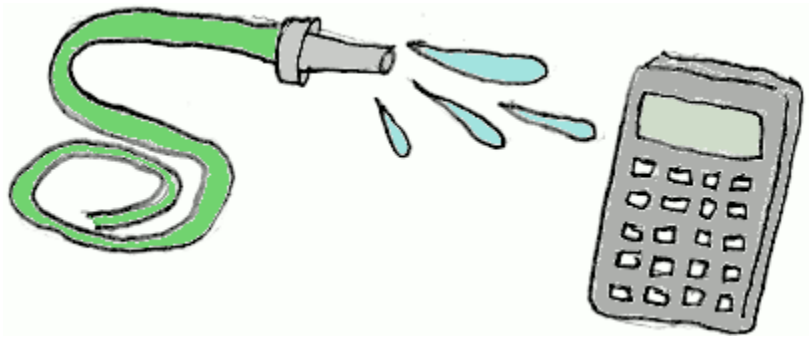
Because this was high school, a *scientific* calculator soon became a must. I got a scientific calculator that lasted well into college, maybe later. Then it got ruined when a neighbor kid sprayed water into my apartment with a hose.

I bought an inexpensive scientific calculator at Walgreens to replace it. This device was junk. The keys didn't even work half the time. So I didn't have it very long.

Later, I got a new scientific calculator that had a bigger screen that could supposedly draw graphs and show other very advanced tasks. It was said to be so advanced that it was like a miniature computer, and the instruction manual was as big as a whole book. I didn't have this calculator long enough to learn how to do any of these functions. I had it maybe 6 months when it suddenly stopped working. After that, whenever I turned it on, the whole screen was filled in completely.

I got a regular scientific calculator as its successor. This is probably the one I have now, which is dated 1999. I'm not absolutely sure about this, because there may have been some others in the mix that didn't last long at all. I'm thinking I may have had one in that era that was pretty expensive but only lasted a month or two. I'd probably still have the one from high school if not for some bratty kid playing with a hose. Similarly, the Senate might still have its original gavel if Richard Nixon hadn't broken it.

Whatever the weather, calculators usually last longer than smartphones. My last 2 smartphones each lasted only 3 years and 3 months—either because of shoddy quality or planned obsolescence.



## Customer disservice

While real Americans enjoy well-executed and reasoned First Amendment audits, the bombastic bluenoses who have taken over our discourse are highly disturbed by them.

Not only do these popular videos safeguard the rights of citizen journalists and the public but they also document the decline in customer service lately. This zine is a friend of the worker. We have stood squarely on the side of workers since our inception, and this stance has continued in this decade, as we've defended service workers from being attacked for not wearing masks. These hard-working employees have faced classist complaints, physical assaults, and patrons who call their workplaces to try to have them fired.

But the flip side is establishments where customer service has become a dirty word. A series of First Amendment audits caught a post office red-handed mistreating customers. It's beyond maddening. An employee is heard yelling at clerks not to serve the auditors. Not long after, she shouts at a family waiting in line. It appears that some of those who were skeeped at were disabled.

This of course is very discourteous—in addition to ableist.

Agencies like the post office work for the people—not the other way around. I'm not trying to give post offices a hard time. I'm just telling it like it is.

There are reasons society has norms. Norms meant Donald Trump wasn't supposed to misuse White House grounds for a convention speech. Norms mean colleges aren't supposed to demand a new census just so redistricting can favor a few academics. Norms can't be imposed unilaterally by a handful of elites nor adopted from overseas dictatorships. It violates norms for establishments to abuse patrons as they did in this story.

The Democrats lately have become reactionary totalitarians who don't respect basic guidelines that nobody even thought to violate before the pandemic—even rejecting their own elected officials who don't toe the fascist line. The Democrats also operate a patronage system as corrupt as anything the Republicans had before.

Nobody's perfect—not even us. Things have become so bad that we need to seriously question our more sedate impulses we once had. It's not just customer service. There are people out there who just want to do bad, and folks need to defend themselves from those who aim to harm them. The worse it gets, the stronger the pushback will have to be. Even government *violence* is already not unheard of, and at this rate, I fear it will become more pervasive than ever. I regret not processing the full scope of it a long time ago. You think the past few years have been scary, but you *know* our rulers are planning even worse.

On and on it continues. As companies and agencies take advantage of the disabled, these firms have proven lately that there's no bottom as to how low their customer service in general can go. This isn't just the garden variety poo-poo like Verizon's awful website that logs you out each time you view their products—making it impossible to order from their site—and has a chat room that has automated answers that have nothing to do with the question you asked. The issue now is people being harassed *in person* by various other establishments.

## **I came up with GIS before GIS was cool**

A geographic information system—GIS—consists of computerized storage of data about geographic features, including their shape and other cool info. You'll love it!

I earned a certificate in GIS technology in 2015. And I can program a computer, choose the perfect time, if you've got the inclination, I have got the crime. I've spent much of June perfecting FreeBASIC programs that sort GIS data. But I came up with the idea of GIS before GIS was cool.

I didn't *invent* GIS. Saying I invented it would be like when someone on the Internet told a foe that he invented shitting his pants. GIS already existed when I came up with the idea, but I just didn't know it. As a teenager in the late '80s, I gained a renewed interest in civil engineering, and someone told me you could download a street map of Newport from a BBS. I had plenty of print maps that included Newport, but a computerized version was a novelty I wanted to see. But it was nothing like the advanced maps you see now. It was just thin, white lines on a black background. I don't think it had any text except "I-471" in lettering that was even cruder than the number readouts on *The Price Is Right*. Around that time, I came up with the idea of a computerized list of geographic features—e.g., stretches of road—that included the coordinates of each bend plus other characteristics.

But I didn't know this exact thing had already been around for over 25 years—in the form of GIS.



GIS is used to make maps of all types. But there's some things that maps just aren't designed to show. QGIS allows you to download GIS data from OpenStreetMap. I downloaded all the points stored in GIS form in Hamilton County. And it's surprising what sort of items it has.

For one thing, the OpenStreetMap files you download using QGIS invariably include some features that are well outside the county you're downloading – sometimes by hundreds of miles. My FreeBASIC programs exclude these features by determining whether a point is within a county. But peep what types of features are included. When I was looking at the points from Hamilton County, I noticed that the file attempts to include every tree in the whole county. And not just every tree but also the type of leaves it has. It tries to include every utility pole. It tries to include all of those little concrete barriers you see at the end of parking spaces. Understandably, it attempts to include every traffic light – but it also tries to list the manufacturer of each signal. The file tries to include every flagpole, and now it looks like they're moving on to including coolers for bags of ice at convenience stores.

It even tries to include every Big Boy statue out in front of every Frisch's. This is useful in case you want to go up to each statue and sing right into Big Boy's face, "There's no wa! Badeedle-badeed! At Frisch's Big Boy! 'Cause it ain't such a value!"

Some of this information might have some use to some agencies, but they probably have their own data instead of getting it from OpenStreetMap. If they got their data from OpenStreetMap, it would be like how the CDC got some of its info on COVID vaccines from CNN – but just not quite that bad.

About 25 years ago, I saw printed street maps of our area that were handed out as promotional items by banks and Big Business groups. These maps did a passable job of showing streets, but they had incredible detail for country clubs, showing every bunker and hazard on the golf course. Like some of the details in GIS files today, these were features that didn't have much mainstream interest. These maps were commissioned by organizations that cared more about country clubs. Instead of country clubs, I use GIS to make maps of important things like where the sidewalk was vomited on during Oktoberfest or where someone picked that wad of gum off the floor of the TANK bus and chewed it.

Also, in reading about the history of GIS, we learned that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, each layer of a map was drawn on glass plates. Whooooo man! I bet there were some good stories from people who worked at map publishing companies!

## Taking a bite out of dental firm's data breach

I got a dumb letter in the mail. If it involved any field of medicine other than dentistry, I would have just ignored it, but my audience thinks anything about teeth is hilarious, so I'll cover it.

This letter is from some dental firm in Oregon. I can barely travel a mile to visit a dentist, so I'm certainly not going all the way to Oregon to see one. But, according to this letter, this company contracts with dentists in Kentucky, and it recently experienced a data breach. This breach may have exposed my name, address, Social Security number, and other personal information to hackers. It may have also exposed all of my precious dental records.

The main gist of the letter is that this firm is offering to pay for identity theft protection for one year. I burst out laughing at this! They wouldn't even secure my dental records, but they expect me to trust them to protect my identity? What are they? Idiots?

I hope the hackers are enjoying paying hazardous duty pay each time they go to the dentist now. It's never a good idea to hack the dental records of cool people.



## Soviet public didn't say "nyet" to gum

In America, you blow bubbles. In Soviet Russia, bubbles blow you!

Before World War II, hardly anyone in the Soviet Union had ever heard of bubble gum. A few diplomats partook of this neet to eet treet, as it was more widely available abroad, and Soviet soldiers obtained beegee from American and British military personnel during the war. But it wasn't until the postwar era that the general public was introduced to the sport of bubble gum busting. The rest of the Eastern Bloc began building gum factories before the Soviets did.

Foreign bubble gum did inevitably creep into the Soviet Union, but the Soviets stepped up their gum production in 1976 to prepare for the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. One of the first Soviet brands of bubble gum was made of by-products that resulted from macaroni production and was grayish-brown in color. Maybe that's where Cletus of *The Dukes Of Hazzard* got his gum! The first Soviet gums came in several flavors: strawberry, orange, mint, and coffee. One of the first brands was called Well, Wait a Minute!

The end of the Soviet era brang a close to gum production in most of the former Soviet republics, but bubble gum from China, Pakistan, Syria, and Turkey proliferated.

In the Soviet era, people stockpiled bubble gum and chewed the same wad until it could be chomped no more. Gum was so highly desired that craftspeople made homemade gum by heating up toothpaste on a radiator. Teachers tried to discourage schoolchildren from gumming by telling them gum would turn them into a monkey.

Soviet gum was dense in texture and lost its flavor quickly, but a single piece could be chewed for a long time. Because of its texture, blowing bubbles was hard work indeed. So folks solved this problem by adding butter to it so they could bubble. Some gummers grew tired of the dull colors of Soviet gum, so they crushed colored pencils into it.

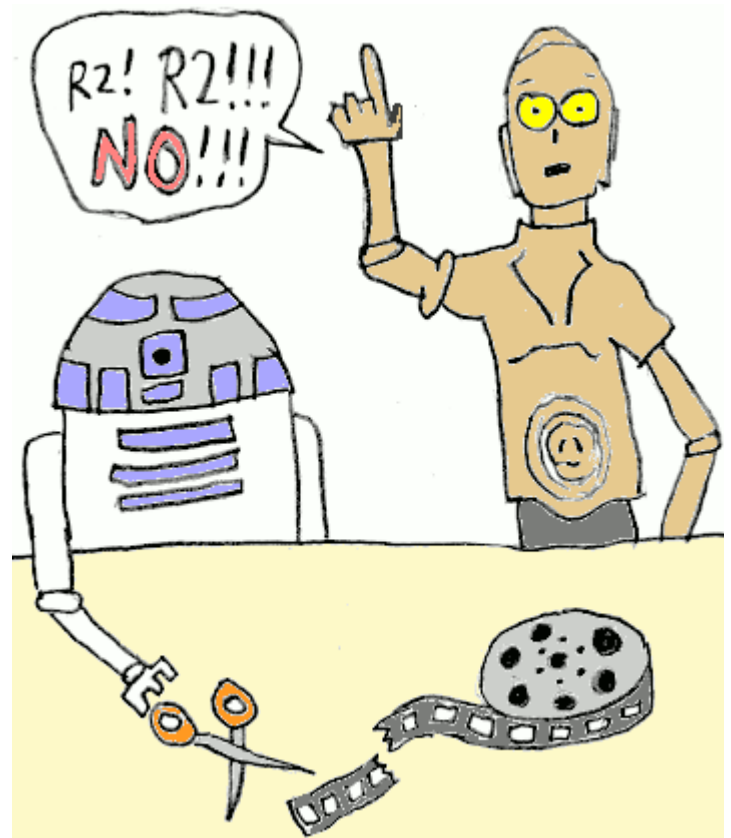
When I was growing up, I came up with an idea for a fictional island country halfway around the world. Someone told me that American money was "backed with gold" and asked me what my fictional country's money was backed with. I answered that it was backed with bubble gum. The reply to that was that this meant that the paper that the money was printed on was made of bubble gum. They said the paper that American money was printed on was made of gold—which was only a myth, but we believed it. I wonder if Soviet rubles were made of macaroni by-products, toothpaste, and coffee.

## May the farce be with you

I appreciate *Star Wars*, but I've never really understood it all that well. But I do grasp the concept of a *universe* that ties together a series of projects.

People talk about the *Star Wars* universe, the *Sesame Street* universe, etc., but every person is a universe in their own right. The *Star Wars* franchise kept exploring planets that were only briefly mentioned earlier in the series. It's like how I've piled up project after project, each building on ones before it. For example, FreeBASIC programs that I now work on are the progeny of projects I drew up on paper grocery bags over 40 years ago. My interest in broadcasting when I was in college has jumped into my mapping programs today that can plot the locations of stations' towers. This very zine links together politics, road trips, and FreeBASIC, and it builds on my early projects.

But did you know the 1977 blockbuster movie that launched the *Star Wars* phenomenon can no longer be found in its original version through any



authorized source?

Younger fans of the *Star Wars* saga have written extensively about how they've only come into existence in the years after the original film's release. They were surprised to be told that versions of the movie they're acquainted with are vastly different from what first appeared, having been edited extensively and filled with new special effects. They've never even been able to see the original.

A 1997 modification reportedly replaced a human actor with a computerized graphic that looks like one of the Letter People. Another change toned down the bar scene to kowtow to censors, which changed one of the main points of the scene.

It appears as if there are a few copies of the unedited original floating around out there. But this edition is out of print. Nobody today authorizes it on any DVD. The only copies out there are bootlegs. Whenever a reel of the original turns up, Lucasfilm confiscates it. Evidently, someone cobbled together a high-definition copy of the original not long ago and offered it online, but I'm skeptical that it's still available.

The edits to *Star Wars* have been likened to the fact that a play being performed today is not the same as it was when it was first written, as each performance of a play is different. But this is not a fair comparison, as a movie is a recorded work. Saying a movie is like a play is like saying a record is like a concert.

The *Star Wars* peeps put out a limited edition DVD set in 2006 that had what it called the "theatrical versions" of the series. But they weren't the "theatrical versions" at all. They were low-quality edits made in 1993.

There have been new edits to *Star Wars* as recently as 2019. Some of the later edits even add whole new characters, or old characters were redone with new actors.

Recently, George Lucas revealed that one reason why there probably won't be an official release of an unedited *Star Wars* is that the negatives are in such bad condition. They must have been in good shape at some point, so the unedited movie should have been made available when they still had the chance. Although Disney purchased Lucasfilm in 2012, Disney itself did not own the original *Star Wars* installment until later.

It's in Mickey Mouse's hands now, but Lucas himself is in no hurry to make the unedited version available. He boasted that even the few copies out there won't be around forever, as they "won't last more than 30 or 40 years" before they deteriorate.

Just a few months ago, someone made a Twitter post titled "The unaltered versions Star Wars trilogy are basically gone forever, and no one cares." This post said this was "one of the greatest crimes against film preservation being committed before our eyes" and accused Lucas of "cruel sociopathy." Somebody replied, "Damn kid you're acting like George Lucas pissed in your cheerios, disemboweled your dog, had an orgy with your family, and threw away your favorite PlayStation." Despite Lucas's stubbornness, it is folly to compare him with *real* sociopaths like my high school principal.

Another work that's been sadly butchered is *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. A clip once appeared on YouTube showing the many edits that occurred within a few years of its first airing. Two of the edits removed references to the special's sponsor Coca-Cola, as the FCC no longer allowed product placements within programs. It's understandable for the FCC to crack down on product placements. But the rest of the many edits were meaningless.

This zine is a fixed work like a movie is supposed to be, but instead of rewriting history, we have simply chosen so far not to repost early issues without context. The buck stops here. All of what we have ever printed has context—or else we never would have published it.

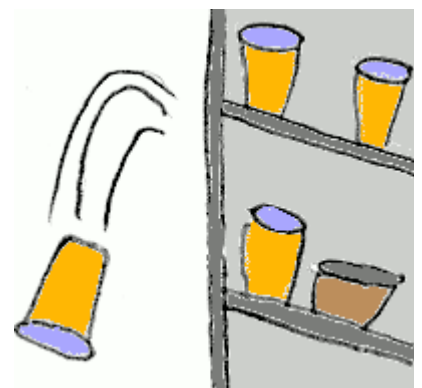
If a handful of malcontents can't appreciate this fact, it's their loss.

Oh no R2!

## A whole tub of cheese got wosted at Kroger

I thought this ish was going to come up short, but you can always count on Kroger to save us at the last minute! It brings a whole new meaning to their "Count on us" slogan.

This happened on Thursday, June 29, so it was almost when this issue was ready to be published. Nobody bubbled. But gobs of food went wastage



bastage.

As I wound through the aisles from the pharmacy counter to the produce section, I opened the dairy case to grab a tub of spread cheese. But some unthinking galoot had placed a tub of the stuff so precariously on a high shelf that it tumbled out of the cooler and onto the stony floor. The plastic container cracked – this ruining all its contents.

Wait! There's more! I went to the snack aisle to get a bag of crackers as a healthy snacky-poo. There were only 3 bags of this brand – and I got the only one that hadn't already been opened in the store. The other bags were wide open, being exposed to all comers.

I think that cheese and those crackers have ceased existing now.

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