

The Last Word™

Issue #621

June 2026

Heart skips a beat over heart monitor bill

For 2 weeks a couple months ago, I was given a heart monitor to see whether I would need another heart surgery. (Here's a hint: I did. The obligatory surgery took place on May 20.)

I wouldn't have balked at paying a nominal cost for the monitor. If I was billed \$15, I would have ponied up instantaneously. Instead, the heart monitor company opted to bite off more than they can bubble with by sending me a bill for almost \$2,000.

I didn't know I signed up to receive a humor newsletter.

The bill said insurance covered precisely zero. For the last 4 words of that sentence, cue the Kermit the Frog voice that I use when imitating a person issuing a stupid decision like this. What's the point of insurance if it doesn't cover medical necessities like this? If you have private insurance, you're already paying steep premiums to cover it. If you have something like Medicare or Medicaid, you're also paying premiums. They're called *taxes*. Either way, you've paid for insurance. There shouldn't be any surprises like bills for \$2,000.

Part of the bill is for the device itself. This is despite the fact that I shipped it back like I was supposed to. I even went through the trouble of shipping it from the UPS Store in Newport so I could get a receipt to prove I shipped it.

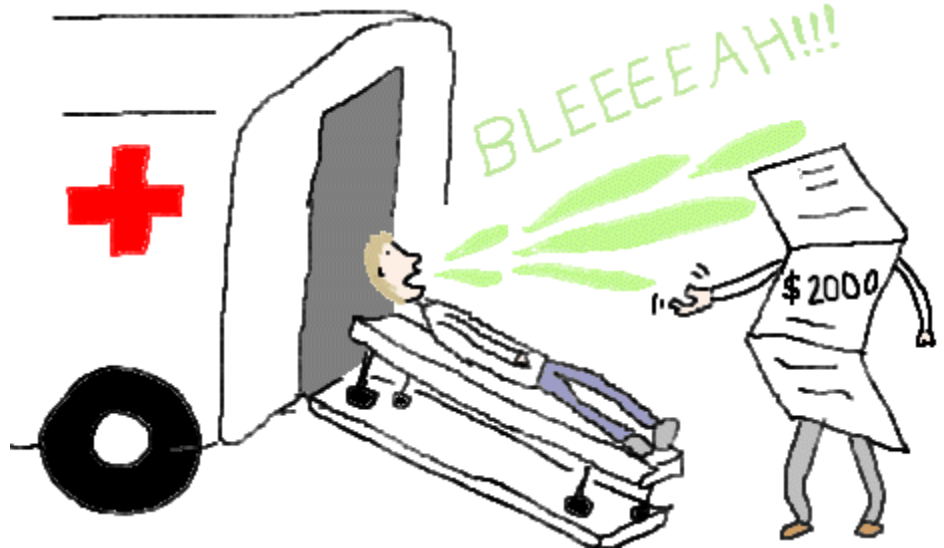
I'm not sure if this is a related issue, but someone posted on the public Internet that this same heart monitor company gave them blood tests that were supposed to be completely covered by insurance—and then billed them over \$4,000. This sounds like it was the insurer's fault for refusing to cover this necessary service. The insurer said it was "out of network"—that battle cry of the modern scoundrel. Somehow, I don't think Hippocrates cared whether patients were "out of network." But naturally—the Internet being what it is—somebody actually defended the insurance company. I swear I'm not making that up.

If I receive a huge bill just once—*just once*—I *might* be able to pay it on an installment plan. But paying one gigantic bill just encourages other big bills. There isn't a slightest chance I can pay *every* big bill. If I had paid every exorbitant medical bill like this without fighting it, I'd be in debt for life.

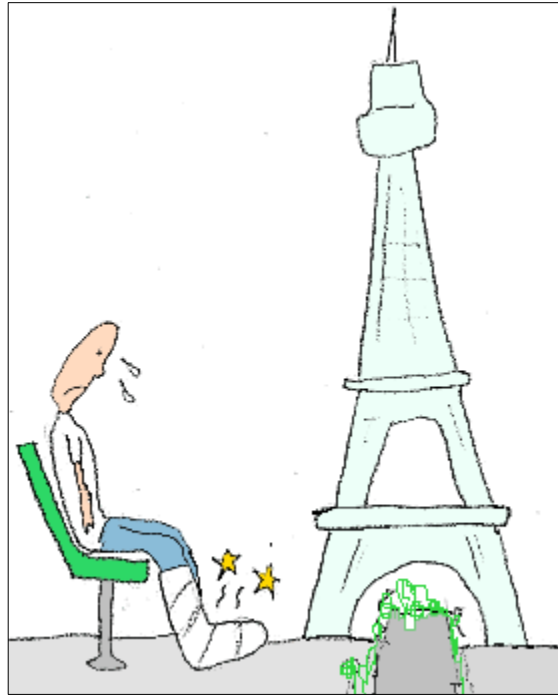
What's hilarious is people who tell me I should just suck it up and pay this bill because folks with more money than me would have also had to pay it. That's a Newt Gingrich-style argument. I pointed out that in almost every other country in the world, this wouldn't be a problem, as the right to healthcare is legally recognized there. They agreed that I'd have a right to it everywhere else. But they said that since I'm in the United States, I don't have that right. Uh, that's not how basic rights work.

Keep in mind that this bill was for a heart monitor ordered by a doctor. It wasn't for something frivolous. Insurance companies aren't doctors. For them to reject the monitor is practicing medicine without a license.

It still hasn't been answered *why* insurance won't cover what it's designed to cover.



Vacation, all I ever ruined...



Here in the Northern Hemisphere, it's getting to be vacation season!

And your hard-earned vacay is likely to be ruined – if you can afford one at all.

These days, when you wake up each morning, it's not a question of *whether* something bad will happen that day, but *what* it will be. We never run out of things that can go wrong. The past few years show that there truly is no bottom. Vacation isn't always an escape from this life of despair – as gobs of posts on the public Internet show.

One person posted that one of the worst things that can happen on an out-of-town trip is getting an e-mail from your boss in which you're scheduled for a disciplinary meeting the day you come back. Somebody replied saying that a friend got a call from his workplace in the middle of his Disney World vacation saying he was laid off. He got this call right in front of Cinderella Castle.

One person said they got food poisoning on a trip to Budapest just before a cruise. How bad was it? "If you think you need to throw up, don't fart." Another commenter said that on their vacation, "I vomited down the front of my shirt in public." One person said the only thing they remember from childhood trips is their dad "throwing fits." Another said the main thing that spoils vacations is "family complaining or getting mad on the first day. It ruins the entire trip." The magic word! Another said, "Within the first hour of any road trip my ex ruined it." The magic word again! One of the main topics the ex grumbled about was bringing the wrong brand of chips. Another person sprained their ankle just before a walking tour of France.

A commenter said her future mother-in-law called during vacation and demanded she come back and visit her in the hospital. The mother-in-law had gone to the emergency room all because of apparent constipation. When she got out of the hospital, she described in detail getting an enema and then insisted that she be taken to a terrible restaurant.

One person said there were 7 vibrators in their luggage, and turbulence on the plane switched one of them on. This set off a fire sensor, forcing the pilots to divert the flight to Texas, where owning 6 or more vibrators is illegal. Then the airline threatened to sue the passenger for the cost of diverting the flight.

A commenter said a friend "wasted our first night of vacation" in South Carolina by getting drunk. One person said he booked a trip to Hawaii right after his girlfriend dumped him. But then the former girlfriend and her new boyfriend not only scheduled a trip there at the same time, but they were on the same flight and stayed at the same resort. And let's put it this way: They made a lot of noise there. One person said a Disney World vacay was ruined because the rental car company that they had already booked decided not to rent out cars during that week. Another commenter said his 10-day Florida trip was pulverized when his wife asked for a divorce halfway through it: "It really ruined my fun at Universal Studios."

One person said their vacation was ruined by “crap in the pool.” Another said the receptionist at their hotel shit in their suitcase. Another said they once went on a family vacation where their dad got drunk at a bar, tackled a bicycle cop, and spent the rest of the trip in jail. Another accidentally left their passport in their rental car during the trip. One feller took his girlfriend to Paris so he could propose to her at the Eiffel Tower, but a variety of misfortunes dashed the trip. For one thing, the tower was closed because of a protest. For another, their baggage was lost on the flight. The bags arrived later with the contents stolen. And they were fined for taking the subway the wrong way.

One commenter said they had a big family trip to Egypt. Their little brother destroyed the trip by spending most of it using the wi-fi in the hotel lobby to argue with his girlfriend. One person said they went on a cruise where some other guests got kicked off for shoplifting and had to find their own way home. Best all, their cruises had been paid for by their employers.

Their careers probably didn't go so well after that. Another commenter said a friend got drunk on vacation and threw a chair off a balcony into the hotel pool at 1 AM. He was kicked out of the inn, and there were no other vacancies in town. Another person said they spent a fortune on a nonrefundable hotel room only for the airline to completely cancel their flight there. One guy said that when he was growing up, he and his brother got in trouble because they kept talking about “farts and poo poos” in the car on the way home from a trip.

Vacations got roodledy-doodledy.



Senior year wasn't poetry in motion

The rank bigotry of our schools was often woven into class projects, which in turn often devolved even further into a ridiculous spectacle—even in ways that were not directly connected to the project's ideology and had more to do with the general atmosphere of misbehavior.

Americans today live in an era of growing institutional discrimination, much of it at the hands of bodies like the Supreme Court or state legislatures that don't understand voting rights laws or the Constitution. But many of our schools have been just as bad for a long time. Our schools should have been treated like the reprehensible jokes they are, but that was hard to do, because they daily pounded helplessness into their victims.

Ninety percent of the time, I did precisely as I was told at school, because schools had everyone bullied so much. But when it rained, it poured.

Let's go back to November 21, 1991. I was a high school senior. It turns out this was the day before a kid at school clogged a toilet with a Bert and Ernie flashlight he shoplifted from Children's Palace, but I digress.

Anyway, November 21. The class was assigned to read a 6-page poem that defended slavery. The poem was so difficult that nobody could even understand it. When everyone complained that the poem was way too hard, the teacher angrily asked, “Do I have to get Mother Goose for you guys?”

The piece defended the indefensible and honored a practice that was dishonorable. And we had to read it *in 1991*. Yet the poem was also so difficult that we spent hours just going over it. The school thought it was so important that they wouldn't let it go. When we got back from lunch, we had to go over it again.

When people still couldn't understand it, the teacher took us to the public library across the street so we could use the dictionary to look up the definition of each word one by one. We could no longer use the dictionaries in the classroom, because my classmates had ruined them by playing catch with them and sticking stickers all over the pages. They were ripped to shreds. But by the time we went over to the library, every student in the class had given up on the poem. Nobody took it seriously.

While we were at the library, a student snuck off to the restroom to smoke a cigarette. When he came out of the bathroom, he yelled, “Somebody died in there!” He exclaimed it loudly enough for everyone else in the library to hear him.

People acted up so much at the library that when we got back to the classroom, the teacher slammed the door with all her might! Then she thundered at the top of her lungs, **“YOUR ASSIGNMENT IS TO ANALYZE THAT ENTIRE POEM, AND YOU BETTER NOT MISS A SINGLE WORD!!!!!!!!!!!! IT WILL BE GRADED VERY DIFFICULTLY!!!!!!!!!!!!”**

Needless to say, this tirade was pretty damn funny!

After her tantrum was over, I piped up and said that the library did indeed smell as if someone had died there. But the teacher didn't say anything in reply.

And nobody did the assignment. The pro-slavery poem was pretty much forgotten about right away.

That library loomed large during my senior year. One time, the school borrowed what seemed like a good book from this libe, put it in the classroom, and wouldn't let anyone read it because the school deemed its content objectionable. We also once had a unit on a well-known book, but instead of buying enough copies for all the students, the school borrowed all of the library's copies. Since there still weren't enough copies, the school photocopied huge portions of the book. Then, when it was time to return the books, we just checked them out again right off the shelf with wheels where books were returned. We grabbed each copy like it was an assembly line. In each of the cases in this paragraph, the rest of the community couldn't use the books because the school was hogging them for nothing.

The school did so many things wrong in this article that it boggles the mind and mindles the bog. Much like how the media today doesn't report enough on unconstitutional and often racist gerrymandering, there was no reportage on the failures of schools I attended, because it had nothing to do with cicadas or *Lifestyles Of The Rich And Famous*.

Park toilets keep getting ruined

There is hope for society after all.

Recent weeks have been mighty toilety in much of America. A restroom at a park in Rapid City, South Dakota, got ruined all up. A local TV station reported, "Toilets and sinks were damaged beyond repair." Footage appeared of a toilet that seemed to have almost nothing remaining except a seat wrapped in plastic grocery bags. A volleyball was also put in a toilet. The garbage cans in the restroom were turned upside-down. Police said 3 juveniles were linked to the case.

At a park lavatory in Fort Smith, Arkansas, there were "people lighting toilet paper and paper towels on fire." Folks also clogged the toilets with clothing items and entire rolls of toilet paper. Someone also dumped mud (we think) in the sinks.

In York, Nebraska, someone removed a stall door from a park restroom and threw it out in the grass. The toilets were clogged with toilet paper in a separate incident. In Geneva, Nebraska, someone completely filled a park toilet with what appeared to be a jacket and assorted trash.

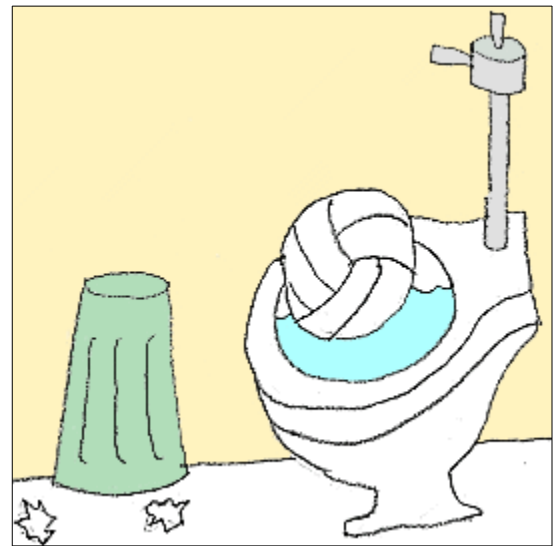
In Bellevue, Nebraska, somebody smashed a mirror in a park restroom and threw a whole roll of toilet paper and part of the toilet paper dispenser in a toilet. The city's community relations director said that a "small group of people is ruining it for everybody." The magic word! In Stanwood, Michigan, somebody pretty much completely destroyed a brand new restroom at a boat dock. Someone utterly trashed an Illinois lavatory by leaving McDonald's bags and beer cans laying around, dumping grass in the sink, and loosening the toilet from the floor. Public restrooms in Stockton, Missouri, were almost completely decimated on the same day they reopened after being renovated.

This craze has even come to the Tri-State! At Stonelick State Park in Clermont County, a brand new restroom suffered horrendous destruction. One photo showed a heavy, cylindrical post from the parking lot in a toilet.

Schools aren't safe either. A high school in Middleton, Michigan, closed the boys' bathroom because of "the disposal of improper items in the toilets."

We weren't going to dance on the graves of these toilets until we read an article about the inequities of recent tax policy changes. Then we decided the system was just spoiling for trouble.

Toilets got ru! Toilets got ru! Nerrrrr nerrr nerrr nerrrrr! Wurma lurma lurmp lurmp, wurma lurma lurmp lurmp!



A person rode a motorcycle up the York Street steps

This is up there with how people used to set off fireworks inside the Ontario department store

or stole beer out of delivery trucks and hid it under the bleachers at high school stadiums all over Campbell County.

Let's take a jaunt over to Newport. Let's bop up York Street to 12th. Up until about a decade ago, there was a set of steps there to a footbridge over the rail line to 13th. After this path was closed, it was never replaced, because officials would rather dance around and go, "Guh-pwipe! Guh-pwipe!" But if you're from northern Campbell County and you're older than middle school age, you probably know the staircase we're talking about. It was a steep, narrow, rickety structure that must have had almost 100 risers. It even had a 90-degree angle halfway up.

It wasn't a good place to take your Green Machine.

Anybip, not long ago, a feller on Facebook related a fond memory of this stairway. He said that when he was a young man, police would chase him through Newport as he rode his motorcycle. It's unclear what prompted these chases. To get away from the cops, he would ride his motorcycle up the staircase and misappear into the hills above!

You can almost envision a *Dukes Of Hazzard*-like scene in which the police try driving their cruiser up the steps, as the stairway falls over and plops the car down on the street and the siren warbles.



Ed Gallrein farted in church

After right-wing extremist and COVID lockdown supporter Ed Gallrein somehow defeated Thomas Massie in the Republican primary for U.S. House in Kentucky's 4th District (despite Massie leading handily in every major poll), a story about flatulence is in order.

In the run-up to the "election", Gallrein kept giving interviews and speeches where he obsessed about ripping bunker blasts. He kept bragging about the time in 2nd grade when he passed gas in church and a nun spanked him. In one interview, he talked about how "I got a whupping when I farted in church", and the interviewers laughed. During a campaign speech, he claimed Donald Trump "knows when I farted in church." In a radio interview, Gallrein again said Trump knew everything about him, "probably all the way back to the 2nd grade when I farted in church." In yet another speech, Gallrein mentioned how his handlers "found out I farted in church." In another interview, he talked about how he "let it slip."

When someone asked him about Nicolás Maduro, Gallrein replied, "We know if Maduro is farting in church."

It is unknown whether Gallrein's church fart was a silent-but-deadly or a loud-and-proud. It may have been a good ol' standard stinker, or perhaps a pop bunk—which is one that just makes a single popping sound.

Kentucky was once the home of champion racehorse Seabiscuit. But now it's the home of Ed Gallrein—a/k/a Airbiscuit.

You better watch out 'cause it's times like this...

The Kodak Disc was like the Domino Rally of cameras.

If you existed in the 1980s, you might remember this camera. I got one of these when I was 12. It lasted maybe 3 years at most.

Disc film was a format for still photos that was sold to a beleaguered public. The film came in the form of a small, flat disc that held a whopping 15 photos.

Fifteen pictures actually wasn't that bad in the days before digital cameras. Also, the disc format was criticized by some because the small negatives produced grainy photos, but they wouldn't have been as grainy if photo labs had bothered to upgrade the lenses they used. Wikipedia says that because of this, "The resulting prints often disappointed the consumer." But the main problems I had with this camera were more serious.

First of all, it was hard to load the disc. Any article you read today that says otherwise is full of hot gas. And the discs were needlessly expensive. This camera also had a very poor range. Unless you

had good lighting, objects more than a few feet away were often not visible in your photo, even though the camera had an automatic flash.

But perhaps the biggest problem with this camera was its brief lifespan. It turned out that the battery in the Kodak Disc—as with almost any smartphone today—could not be replaced by the user. When the battery died, that was the end of the camera—unless you wanted to send the camera away to have the battery replaced, which would have taken months and cost more than a new camera that was better. My Kodak Disc met its end because the battery wore out. Some websites today say you can replace the battery if you have a soldering iron, but you run the risk of being electrocuted by the camera.

There was a thread on Facebook recently about the Kodak Disc. Someone said the battery was supposed to last as long as the camera but “they started failing after a couple years.” This contributed to how unpopular this camera was. Somebody else posted that these batteries would sometimes overheat and explode.

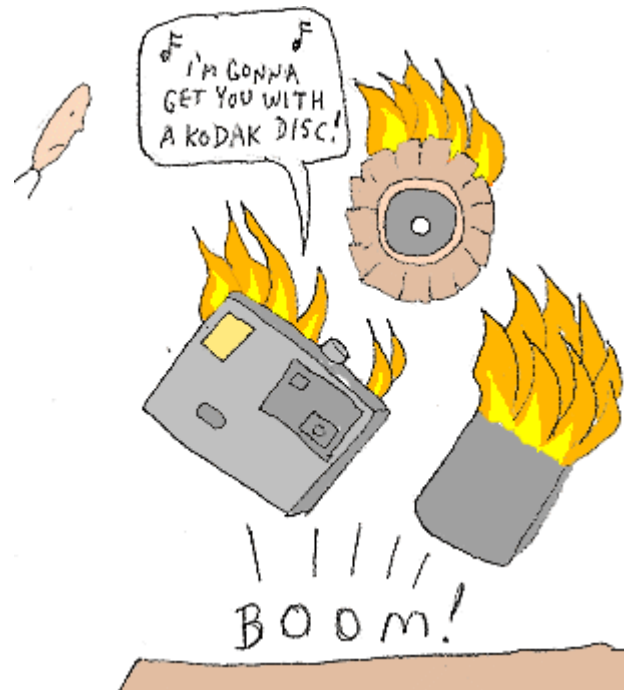
An online post actually asks, “How long does it take to charge a Kodak disc camera?” A man replied, “Into what exactly? Something actually useful?”

Some problems though weren’t even caused by the quality of this camera or the battery. We used to take our photos to Kmart to be processed, and Kmart had a habit of overexposing them (which ruined them for good) or losing them altogether.

Nonetheless, one blog placed the Kodak Disc as one of the all-time worst cameras. Yet this site said that as late as 2019 there was still a store in Kansas that processed disc film. Another website simply says the Kodak Disc failed because “it took terrible photos.” And a Reddit post says the Kodak Disc series was “some of the worst cameras ever to grace the shelves.”

My Kodak Disc was not the camera I had that got stolen from me. That happened several years after I had the Kodak Disc.

I’m gonna get you with a Kodak Disc! On second thought, maybe I won’t.



More vacays got ru

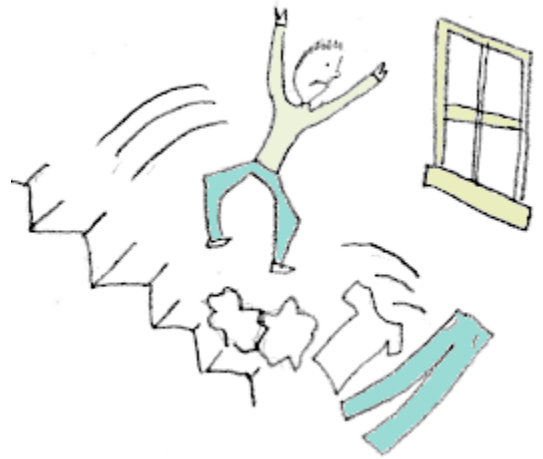
Because this is a day ending in “Pooing is cool”, we need to run more stories we found on the public Internet of vacations getting ruined. So why not read ’em, and why not peep?

One online commenter said her hotel threw her out after 2 nights, because they didn’t know she had booked for 7—even though she had proof she had paid in advance. On another trip, she got on her plane to find another passenger had a ticket for the same seat. Other passengers on that flight also found that the airline had sold their seats to multiple customers. One commenter said she thought she accidentally threw away her credit card in a gas station trash can and drove a half-hour back to the station to empty out the trash to look for it. It turned out she had her card with her the whole time.

A man took his girlfriend to Hawaii, and everything went awry. The girlfriend’s sister-in-law dropped them off at the airport but drove away before they could get all their luggage out. So they had to go to Hawaii with just the clothes on their backs. They got to their vacation condo too late, so they were locked out. Later, they got food poisoning. Then they missed their flight home, because the girlfriend used an oxygen generator and the airline was afraid the battery would die—even though they had made it there just fine.

A woman said she went on a trip to Italy, and her rental car was broken into there. All her clothing and prescription medications were stolen. A man left his credit card at a gas station and didn’t know it until he was 230 miles away. A family booked a Las Vegas trip and arrived to find a \$300 “resort fee” that spoiled the whole outing. That was after the company they booked through had already said it was paid in full. The “resort fee” included things like notary services that they’d never use. This vacationer actually got the credit card company to take off this fee.

One woman said a childhood trip to Texas was ruined when her cousins kept having spitting contests off the balcony of their hotel room. A vacation in Ohio was spoiled because an auto repair shop managed to inflict \$1,400 in damage to the car just before the trip—forcing it to be fixed again during the trip. Then the air conditioning went out when it was 90 degrees outside. A woman said her husband lived in Germany for work, and when she visited him there, he kept tripping over their laundry and falling down the steps into the neighbors' foyer. The neighbors became furious when he finally crashed through a window. The woman also said her luggage was 3 days late getting home “and most of my carefully packed pottery was ruined” because the airline was so rough with it. One commenter said she was riding the New York subway and saw a man sit down on some bags full of souvenirs that belonged to a duo of Hungarian tourists—thus crushing the items. Then the man became enraged at the tourists. One woman said she took her kids on a beach trip abroad, and their snorkels were stolen from the beach.



The Ru Crew is on the prow!

I throw up my hands...

Well, this is the way it goes, I guess. Some people make it, and some people don't.

I think I'm at the point where I just have to throw up my hands (as Bourgeois Tagg would say). I've been trying to get to the bottom of why I was treated so shabbily by our school system—treatment that has caused chronic health problems ever since. Now I think the matter went as described below.

About 30 years ago, I read in a book that once in a while—and I mean a *very great while*—someone is born who has certain specific talents but is an academic failure. Their talents are not highly desired by the official economy but crop up with mind-blowing gusto in unofficial venues. All the while, the person hones in on detail and functionality and doesn't see the need to impress their “superiors” for its own sake. None of this would be a problem, except that their school constantly dug in on singling them out for mistreatment.

The book made a point of saying how rare this is. There were only something like 10 known instances.

I think my situation is one of these rare moments. I don't know exactly what happened.

It would have never been a problem for me if schools I attended hadn't opted to make it one. If not for their malicious, selfish choices, I wouldn't have even known about it, and I wouldn't have to write about it now. Schools are supposed to adapt to students' learning styles—not the other way around.

Now we all pay for the consequences of their refusal to do their job. If schools won't do their job, that's their fault and nobody else's.

On the other hand, the results could have been even worse for society. At one point when I was a teenager, it was noted that math was my best subject, so I was told that I should go on to college, graduate, and apply for a cushy job at a big corporation where I would have to calculate how many defective products they could make before getting sued. So—if they had gotten their way—we would have had surgical mesh breakdowns and exploding bike batteries in the 1990s instead of the 2020s.

Yep, that would have really shown everyone! But I just don't know *what* it would have shown them.

I don't think I would have lasted too long at that job, because I'm sure I would have blown the whistle soon enough. Whistleblowing is something the media won't do, even though it's their job. They just sit on important information, like how they wouldn't disclose the location of the 2020 Riverfest fireworks until after it took place. In recent years, one of the most common phrases in news articles is about how something “leaves more questions than answers.” Well, it's the media's job to find the answers, and they won't do it.

At my current stage in life, I can't start over, and my struggles that were instigated by the school system have made it increasingly difficult to adapt to today's economy. It didn't have to be this way, but it's too late now. It appears that I happen to be among that tiny group of people discussed

above. After I'm gone, scientists might be able to research it. There must be some sort of medical reason why I was unable to focus on schoolwork, such as an accidental physical injury that didn't seem serious at the time.

One factor is that I'm comparing the way I was treated to that of former schoolmates who were born into well-to-do families. Rules never applied to them, and they were set for life. But that doesn't explain why I was singled out more than everyone else too.

Here's an example of my learning style. I actually remember the layout of the page of stories I had to read in a textbook in 7th grade and even *the font they were printed in*, but I could not follow the plot or theme of the story no matter how hard I tried. And I did try the best I could.

I'm no longer able to call any sort of customer service without hours of preparation. Plus, there was a time back in March when I felt like I was going absolutely mad—and the rest of the time also isn't great. Life has become a disaster that defies description. It's frustrating that I can't even put into words how bad it is.

Narcissists will continue to stab the air and say, "Nah-ah-ah!" because I once hurt their precious feelings 35 years ago, or maybe they'll say, "Nah-ah-ah-ah-ah!" because I didn't cancel my Cincinnati roadmeet like they seemed so determined to make me do.

It was a race against time to save our timeline

The Google gobbleguggery continues.

America is fast becoming a police state where every move is tracked—except when you actually want or need it to be tracked. For years, Google Maps has had a feature called a timeline—which helps you keep a record of your whereabouts. The timeline is one of the last gasps of the Google we once knew from before its decay. But this timeline is being chiseled away at.

We had to replace our smartphone back in April, and we tried importing our timeline from our old phone. But, weeks later, we found that it had only imported the timeline going back to a month before. Everything else going back to 2017 was gone. Gone into thin air.

Luckily, we hadn't thrown away the old phone yet.

We were able to transfer the whole timeline after we refreshed the timeline on the old phone.

Apparently, this is a bug that Google has known about since 2024. Other people have had the same problem—and they didn't discover it until after they threw out their old phone. So they were out of luck.

Yet maybe this bug isn't really a bug but a feature—an attempt to completely flush the 2010s down the memory hole. The 2010s have been the only decade since the 1970s in which America saw any significant societal advancement at all, and there seems to be a concerted effort to turn back the clock as if the decade never took place.

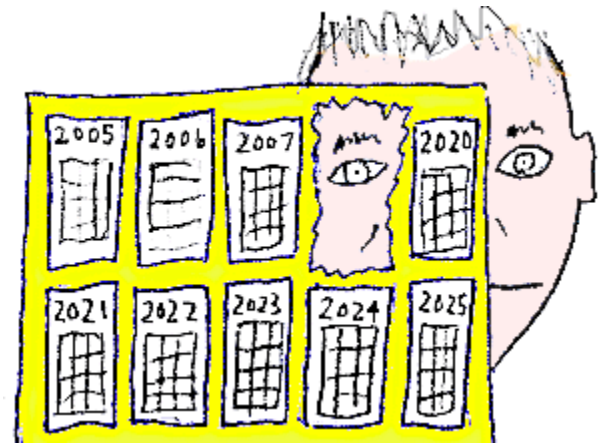
We recently saw a piece that said that a staggering 38% of websites that existed in 2013 are now gone completely. They're not just no longer updated. They're not even found on archive sites. Nobody is known to have a copy of them.

Personal blogs, gone. Photo albums, gone. There was a blog at the time on how to travel with no budget. It's gone.

Some of the best and most dynamic websites of the era were inexplicably never even archived, and if they were, the archive has mysteriously vanished. Yet—somehow—garbage from earlier years manages to survive. We've been trying for years to have posts that were forged with our e-mail address that are much older removed from Google's archive. Google used to have a feature to let you do this, but now they refuse to delete these posts, using the excuse that it would make their archive incomplete. Well, the archive is already incomplete, as almost the entire 2010s have been wiped out. Google is making money off posts that people deceptively attached our address to, and won't do a damn thing about it.

Not too long ago, Google also stopped caching websites for its search.

In short, nothing is ever saved—unless it's something that should be deleted. They manage to



get everything perfectly backwards.

Google admitted in 2024 that timeline data would now be stored on users' phones instead of Google's servers. They said it was to protect privacy. This is ironic, considering Google has no respect for our privacy, as it refuses to delete forged posts.

We have so many great personal memories from the late 2010s, and Google almost lost them forever. We're just lucky we happened to keep our old phone sitting here for weeks after we replaced it. Like we said, other people weren't fortunate enough to have kept their old phone long enough to notice the problem. They lost years of memories.

Somebody posted that they were putting together a lawsuit against Google over its negligence. This individual said Google actually turned off their timeline and set it to automatically delete entries after 3 months without even telling them. Over 10 years of entries about vacations and personal milestones were irretrievably lost.

ABC is also involved in the right-wing purge against the do-it-yourself decade. The media giant has now removed all content from Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight from its website. An entire library of thousands of pages of political knowledge has been burned to the ground. Silver had offered to buy the archive from ABC, but the network refused.

The decade of people's movements like Occupy Wall Street, successful initiatives like "housing first", and popular community projects like free spaces is being erased from history—and the media is happy to help. Even *bad* events should appear on the historical record, because people can learn from them. Few things are more irritating than glossing over bad events. But there has been a special effort to erase not just *records* of good events but to reverse all they accomplished. Wiping out an entire period of 10 to 15 years is the exact same thing the Khmer Rouge did (before Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush began supporting it). Gentrification is another direct Khmer Rouge parallel—only it's in slower motion.

It's also a metaphor for the way Social Security has been robbed to feed the bloated war machine. Everything people worked for has gone up in smoke, and soon there won't be anything left.

If America had a major political party that was not of a right-wing authoritarian bent, this party could establish a litmus test for its candidates under which not only would there be accountability for the lockdown atrocities but also for the growing online censorship and the widening memory hole. We must move toward the model of an open Internet that we were promised 30 years ago.

Kazooing is cool

I found something that made me laugh uncontrollably!

In the late 1990s—as I've discussed before—someone in Nashville who used the handle Mr. Stupid posted an uproariously disorganized website about people blowing bubbles with bubble gum. Back when it was free to start websites—before the subscription and social media garbage we see today—there were several sites on this same topic. All were too funny for words.

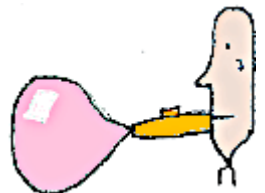
But this one in particular was even funnier because the articles were so incredibly idiotic and because you had to scroll through each page to get to the next one. Now I'm starting to think the whole thing was a big, elaborate troll, and that whoever was behind it was laughing the whole time about the reaction it produced.

I had thought for years that no trace even still existed of this site. But—out of sheer luck—I happened to be cleaning out a folder on my computer and found a text file in which I had saved some of the hilarious comments people posted in the guestbook.

At least one person said it was the worst website they had ever seen. One person said, "You talk about having a cool page devoted to bubble gum but all there is on this page is total crap. What a bunch of losers!" Another said, "You're the biggest shithead I ever met on the web! Your name suits you, but only if it's Mr. FUCKING SHITHEAD Stupid."

I actually posted something in the guestbook in response to the article about blowing bubbles through a kazoo...

"Blowing a bubble through a kazoo certainly seems feasible, but it would probably ruin the kazoo. I got Silly Putty stuck down inside my kazoo when I was a kid, and it ruined it by clinging to the



tissue paper that covers the little hole on the top of the kazoo. But it's certainly a very comical concept! I wonder if you can blow a bubble through a tobacco pipe?"

I don't remember why I put Silly Putty in the kazoo. I still have this kazoo, and I think it still has dried Silly Putty stuck to it.



After finding this old file, I tried looking online for stories about people trying to bubble through a kazoo. I was confronted with AI slop like this: "If bubble gum is stuck inside a kazoo, the goal is to harden the gum to remove it or use a solvent to dissolve it." But I did find a post about somebody getting bubble gum stuck down inside his trumpet.

Mr. Stupid was the website owner who was later called a "con man" even though there's no evidence that he ripped off anyone. All he did was say he was going to post some items, and then fail to post them before his site went down not long after.

At least Mr. Stupid was from a city that's fivish.

Frown! You're on Flock camera!

Newport's been Flocked!

It's come out now that Newport has been secretly operating spy cameras run by Flock Safety for months. It's part of a trial run offered by Flock to promote its miserable product.

Except it's really not much of a secret. Anyone can see the cameras in plain sight. There's about 15 throughout the city.

It also turns out that Newport had a program in place as long ago as 2001 to do essentially the same thing Flock does now. The only difference is that this was before Flock or more "advanced" AI.

The city has come up with several wimpy excuses for trying to get Flock. One is that there's no expectation of privacy in public. But there *is* an expectation of due process and protection from unlawful searches. Plus, at the same time the city lectures everyone that there's no expectation of privacy in public, imagine if you can what the reaction would be if a First Amendment auditor came to town.

In other cities, motorists keep getting pulled over because Flock doesn't know the difference between the numeral 0 and the letter O on their license plate. Other people have been confronted by police after Flock linked them to folks whose car or appearance bear no resemblance whatsoever to theirs. Chicago area school districts are using license plate reading cameras to track cars of students' parents to make sure the kids are enrolled in the right district. Several families were mistakenly told they were not residents of the district, and their children were not allowed to go to school there anymore.

Repeatedly catching the wrong people is a hindrance to investigating cases. Contrast this with older cases that were solved when police did the gumshoe work of solving them without relying on bogus AI data. I remember a case in my neighborhood in my youth—involving mail tampering and other crimes—where the cops caught the culprit right away. If Flock had been around then, there's a good chance they would have focused on completely innocent entities, because AI is so unreliable.

Any time there's a crime around here now, I learn more about it from a handful of Facebook posts than what you can learn from AI. I plead, I beg, I implore that I can crack the case, only to be told I'm wrong because AI says so.

The rise of the surveillance state is one of several developments that has fostered public mistrust of police. Paid trolls bawled hell out of us because we fought back against these developments, but there was an entire system in place that was just *asking* for a fight. For years and years. Play stupid games, win stupid prizes.

Who did the city of Newport think it was fooling by not admitting that it had Flock cameras? Most of them were clearly visible, especially the one on the approach to the Taylor-Southgate Bridge. It was a lie of omission. Bellevue lied outright about a Flock camera, but Newport's lie of omission was just as bad.

New pipeline isn't such a gas

Along with data centers, rising utility rates should be among the hottest political issues right now—not the culture war shit that the Tea Party gibbered about. Culture war hogwash is the

Republicans' equivalent of the Democrats' COVID garbage. The difference is that the Republicans were at it earlier.

We've been informed of a particular matter with utilities in one area near here. It seems that the old natural gas pipeline there was recently replaced. The problem with this is that the homes that had been connected to the old pipeline were not connected to the new one, as the utility company would not permit it. This means that everyone will have to replace their natural gas appliances with either electric or propane, and if they select the latter, they'll have to get a tank too. Whatever they choose, each household will have to spend at least \$10,000.

As these residents are not allowed to use the new pipeline, they get none of the pipeline's advantages and all of its disadvantages. It runs right through their property, but they're not even allowed to use it. It was reported that when the new pipeline was being installed, residents' trees and yards were destroyed, and that they were not restored.

This was after state legislators allowed utility companies to charge exorbitant rates and additional fees. People are quite fed up.

It isn't just Kentucky. It's other states too. Since 1998, utility firms have racked up over \$132 billion in lobbying fees. A few cities and states have fined utilities for violations. In 2018, New Orleans fined Entergy for using paid actors to support a planned gas plant. A few states have laws that specify that utilities can't pass the cost of political activities onto customers. But most states and cities refuse to do shit.

Man, our public officials are amazing! Imagine making absolutely zero progress on hardly any issue for 45 years! It takes effort to be this bad. You'd think the people would have enough votes to overcome utility lobbying. But maybe the reason most politicians don't care about this is that they need to see what focus groups have to say. They need to know what people who repeatedly donated to Mitt Romney or Jim DeMint 15 or 20 years ago think.

And it's actually both major parties to an extent. Believe it or not, the Democrats had no plan to respond if the Voting Rights Act was overturned. It's the same for every other issue – if they're not the instigating party themselves.

Every time there's a story like this, it shows once again that the public has been forced to fight a long-running war against a cartel of dominionist land moguls and corporations that are so ruthless that they make J.R. Ewing look like Mister Rogers in comparison.

Showing some class!

Man, we don't get this.

Let's talk about class consciousness. An important thing, that class consciousness. Here at **The Last Word**, we're big on it. We'll be chewin' some later!

What we don't get is when people don't recognize class consciousness and think we should abandon it. Every so often, we're confronted with talk about businesses that seem designed exclusively to appeal to those of a much higher economic level. Some folks are flabbergasted that we're uninterested in partaking of these establishments.

We're actually surprised they're so interested in them. We simply *don't understand it!* Judging by the costs, we're even more surprised that they can actually afford to go there.

We were apprised of such a business not long ago. We vaguely remembered it being mentioned sometime before, but we didn't know what it was. Recently when people started talking about it, we looked at its website. Our jaws hit the floor at how much its offerings cost. We didn't even know what most of its items *are!*

My heart started racing when I saw it. I was embarrassed to even be looking at the website. My reaction would be like if a person with slightly more money than me was invited to meet the richest royal family in the world. I was quite unnerved. This episode is going to go down in history, but I *have to* write about it here. *Have to*. It's not only interesting, but instructive. I write for the benefit of my fans. Everything I do, I do it for you (as Bryan Adams would say).

We are not made of money. In my day, my household was not well-to-do. I wouldn't say we were utterly destitute. But I *guarantee* you we weren't rich either. We worked hard for what we had. From that alone, it should be easy to see why I exhibit class consciousness. But I've had other experiences at many different points in life – often decades apart – that have expanded my concerns.

Our reactions outlined in this article apply to many different types of businesses. It's surprising

that so many of these places have lasted for so long, because you'd think there wouldn't even be enough people rich enough to go there. In addition, some of them appeal to what we've always seen as very niche concerns that are far outside the realm of what most people we know would ever care about. Some of us are proud of being un pampered. We want to communicate realism instead of wealth.

Satisfaction for us comes from living in harmony with our surroundings. We have obligations, but when we have free time, that is spent on enjoying the environment that is sprawled out before us. It exists for reasons. I can't process it as well as I used to, but it's made to be enjoyed. Time is running out for me to do so.

We must also note that many customer reviews of high-end businesses alluded to in this piece are less than stellar, and at least one accused the place of ruining a once-in-a-lifetime occasion. Another claimed the well-known owner suddenly showed up there drunk and made a spectacle of himself.

Congress's lifting of saccharin label not so sweet (a blast from the past)

This is the story of one of the most aggravating domestic policies of Congress under the Contract With America that we'd never heard of. Seriously, we never knew of this until recently—perhaps because the Republican Congress was doing so much madcap nonsense that it was buried.

Research in the 1970s showed that saccharin causes bladder cancer. But that was in the years when Congress actually had positive accomplishments. So in 1977, Congress rightly passed a bill requiring products containing saccharin to carry a warning label about its carcinogenic properties, and the bill was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter.

Consumer advocates, scientists, and health officials hailed this legislation. The labels at least drew enough attention to the toxicity of saccharin that families could make more informed choices about what foods to buy.

All was well on this front for many years—until the mood in Congress changed. In the 1990s, the dominant philosophy in Congress became that lawmakers were not there to serve the people but rather to remove what they saw as an oppressive yoke of regulation that was hurting the fee-fees of big corporations. In 1997, an industry group called the Calorie Control Council demanded that saccharin be removed from a government list of carcinogens. This move was opposed by leading scientists and the Center for Science in the Public Interest. But Congress wasn't interested in science.

So in 2000, Congress repealed the labeling requirement.

You positively cannot write dumber fiction than this true story. We're shocked that the labeling requirement was ever lifted, because lifting it was such an outrageously idiotic thing to do. We don't even remember hearing about this before. If we had, we almost certainly would have remembered. We remember Old Stopsignface, so why not?

A few years after this, a study showed that saccharin caused significant weight gain—which defeated the stated purpose of this chemical.

Anymore, however, if you search online for scholarly studies about the dangers of saccharin, you're met by AI detritus and other propaganda saying it's safe. Their source? Those great scientific minds in Congress. These sites say saccharin is safe because Congress lifted the labeling regulation. Congress says it, so it must be true.

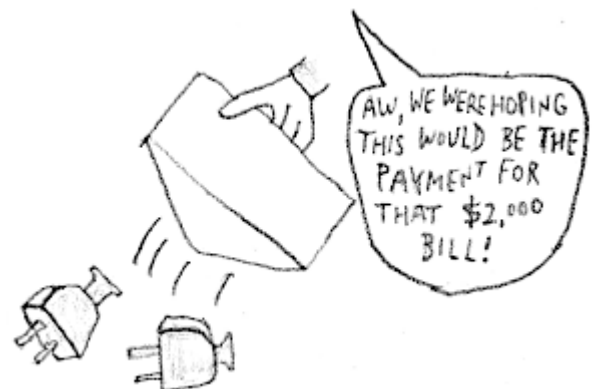
Saccharin is still used in a few food items. Now is a good time to talk about reinstating the labeling requirement. If the federal government won't do it, the states should.

I have plugs in my groin that I can't mail anywhere

Because of the 2 heart surgeries I've had, I now have 2 permanent plugs in my groin. They're designed so they do not come out—ever.

Isn't that cool?

It's like how your dentist gives you fillings that are supposed to stay for good. With 2 plugs and 20 fillings, I have hardly an original part left!



But, since these plugs are designed to stay, that means I can't mail them anywhere. If I could mail them, where would they go? Publishers Clearing House? One of those radio contests where you win a record album for answering a trivia question? The Sea-Monkeys people?

If you get a plug in the mail, it's likely not mine, since mine are supposed to stay.

Whoever? Whomever? Whatever! (a poopysm)

We miss Howard Cosell.

But did you know the longtime ABC sportscaster was responsible for a poopysm? We don't mean the time he threw up on Don Meredith's boots and billed ABC for a taxi trip from Philadelphia to New York. That actually got some significant coverage. Rather, this is about a different incident—which took place during a 1983 broadcast of *Monday Night Football*.

That evening, the Kansas City Chiefs hosted the San Diego Chargers. Before the game, Cosell interviewed Chiefs coach John Mackovic. Mackovic made the mistake of using the word *whoever*. Instead of moving on to the next question, Cosell insisted the proper word was *whomever*. He was more interested in correcting Mackovic's grammar than in the game.

The two men argued about it for several minutes.

Mackovic: "Whoever."

Cosell: "Whomever."

Mackovic: "Whoever."

Cosell: "Whomever."

Mackovic: "Whoever. My implied sentence was, 'Whoever is in the game would be used.' Thus, 'whoever' is the subject and therefore correct."

Cosell: "Whomever."

Mackovic: "Whoever."

Cosell: "Whomever."

Hate to tell you this, Howard, but John Mackovic held a language degree.

Mackovic finally got frustrated and walked away from the interview.

This incident has been described as one of the most ridiculous occurrences in the history of *Monday Night Football*.

ǝ!

There is nothing more 1990s Cincinnati than the scowl and the groan.

We've discussed it before. For years, even the mildest criticism of a big corporation was met with one or the other (or both).

But now it turns out the groan has its own 27th letter of the alphabet: ǝ.

We're placing this article at the end of this ish, because some computers or smartphones might not have that letter in any of its fonts, and I don't want it to throw off the rest of the PDF file. It looks like an upside-down *e* with a tilde.

This is actually a regular vowel sound in some languages. These languages use it in actual words, not just groans and grunts. Some articles describe it as a "mid central vowel" — something like a schwa — but nasalized.

The Cincinnati groan also has an unusual intonation. Think of the *Sesame Street* skit where the Number Painter paints a 9 on a street. The intonation of this groan sounds like the end of this segment when a frustrated Painter laments, "Nine!"

Here's how the groan might be used. Suppose you say, "Kroger and Walmart really don't need to monopolize 95% of the local grocery business."

The inevitable reply from corporate apologists: "ǝ!"

We're not sure why they liked big corporations so much. Apparently, they expected us to be in permanent debt to large companies just because they hired someone we knew from 8th grade—even though they downsized them out of their job 6 months later. The equivalent today would be being required to praise data centers that create 5 temporary construction jobs before killing millions more jobs.

It's also like how now the media complains about "quiet quitting" and acts like it's a crisis. Wikipedia says "quiet quitting" is when "employees avoid going above and beyond the call of duty by

doing the bare minimum required and engage in work-related activities solely within defined work hours." Well, why *wouldn't* employees work only during work hours? Why would they do more than what their job requires? "Quiet quitting" is a media neologism that appeared when a few workers stopped answering work e-mails at midnight and refused to work without pay on weekends.

The real crisis is "quiet stealing" – which never makes the news. This includes direct wage theft, which now costs the American economy \$50 billion per year. Another form of wage theft is the fact that the federal minimum wage hasn't increased in 17 years, even as corporate profits are the highest ever. When you suggest raising the minimum wage or increasing taxes on billionaires and big corporations, you're always told it will "kill jobs", but when companies replace most of their employees with AI, you're told that's just too bad.

Mark our words. The response to "quiet stealing" will be: "ñ!"

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