

Hedge Trimmings

Vol. 2, No. 3 | December 2008

The Alarmist

...Continued from the previous issue

4. If at First You Don't Succeed

Peach didn't get it right the first time. He didn't get it right the second time. But by subtly varying the pitch and length of his newborn baby cries, some of which his mother, father, and doctor couldn't even hear, he eventually arrived at the proper frequency. Within seconds.

Every window, every glass, every bathtub, and every toilet within a radius of three miles was no more. Peach—and the world—woke up.

5. The Givers of Care

Peach, then, woke up in a bed. Not the wet bed in which he was born. And not the bed—the crib—his parents had intended him to sleep in. That bed, the crib, was located in a room painted blue like the sky.

No, the bed Peach woke up in was in a lab. The walls were white. The floor tile. And the ceiling harshly lit with fluorescents. It was an operating room. A veritable theater of medical examination and exploration.

The doctors didn't know what to do. They poked him. They prodded him. They provoked him. They placated him. They even perforated him, flying in an expert in the fine art of acupuncture from Hokkaido for that very reason. To no avail.

No number of needles, scalpels, saline bags, or cotton swabs could reveal the mystery of this newborn alien from the planet of sound. One moment, Peach was a baby: A pink, wrinkled, understandably angry baby. And in another moment, a moment already passed, Peach was a banshee, an Irish demon whose scream signals someone's—or something's—death.

6. Putting the Ire in Ireland

It is thought that the banshee's cry can only signal the death of a member of either the O'Neill, O'Brien, O'Connor, O'Grady, or

Kavanagh families. Those who have held onto that thought have another think coming. Intermarriage has since extended that select list, and by some genetic twist of fate, the Sebastian family might very well be on it. Or yours.

7. Roddy Doyle Ha Ha Ha

He was walking down the hall. Dr. Smuckers paused at the door and swiped at it with his cane. He missed. He swiped again. Missed again. Smuckers reached into his pocket for a soiled handkerchief and wiped his brow. Then his mouth. Then he wiped the hankie on his herringbone pants leg and swiped again with the cane.

Finally: A hit!

It was a patient's door. Smuckers had waited 10 minutes to hail a cab. It took five minutes to reach the house. Some say Smuckers could have walked there in 12. Regardless, when he arrived, he learned it was a walkup. Serves him right. Buzzed in, he breached the foyer, passing piles of Chinese takeout menus; mouldering books wrapped in newspaper; and mouldering newspapers themselves, sheathed in shear blue plastic bags. People were always having babies. But they were never doing anything to help him.

—Sebastian!

—Sebastian!

—Sebastian, Sebastian, Sebastian!

Mr. Sebastian opened the apartment door, eyes wide as pies.

—You called and said you had a baby.

—We're about to have a baby. She's about to have a baby. She's having a baby. She's... had the baby.

—I see. Indeed. \$20 copay, please.

To be continued...

Letter of Comment

You won't see me much in the bundles because I am pretty inactive because [of] other obligations. Nevertheless, I am a reader of the bundle and find your new contribution to be refreshing and invigorating.

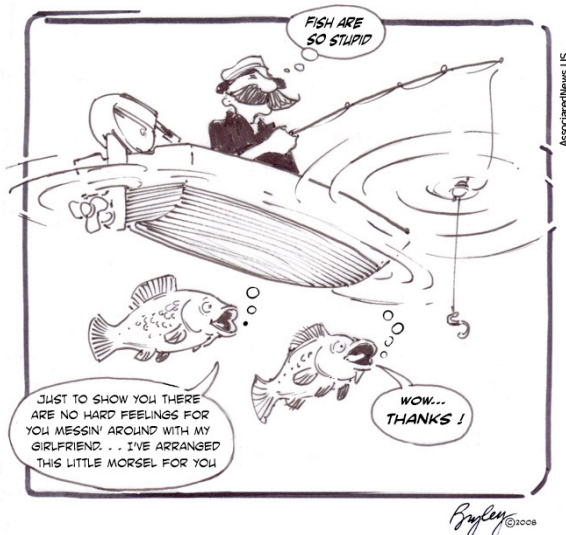
Not totally clear about those Happy Things [HT #1], but get the gist of what you're after. We don't much appreciate anything for very long, do we? A guy cleans up his yard and cuts his grass, trims the hedge, etc., and we might say "Great looking place you've got there, Jim." Next day we throw out trash from the car, which lands under his hedge, and then start talking about the mess he has there.

Altogether it was a most interesting bundle, and I am happy to see your journal amongst those pieces I opted to lay aside and read. Thanks for doing it.

—Richard L. Hopkins

Thanks for the loc – and kind words! Do you mean that it's unclear how the Happy Things look? If so, imagine Mr. Bill or Gumby, made of clay, and animated, only repeating the same limited motions in one place. That's the kind of visual image I was going for. If you have a chance to watch the video that inspired the story – <http://tinyurl.com/4prxu9> – it might be even more clear. For the most part, I was aiming for a speculative fiction vibe in which the world wasn't that different from our own – just the addition of the little creatures, source unknown. HR

I also heard from: Kathleen DesHotel, Bob Dobson, and Fred Liddle.



Mismatched Shoes

An item in *The Letter Exchange* #17 this fall read, "Looking for source of shoes sold in two sizes for one pair." A quick Web search for "mismatched shoe sizes" yielded two quality options for sources of such shoes, One Shoe Two Shoe and Mix Match Shoes.

The first operation is based in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and offers men's and women's shoes from Avia, Birki's, Easy Spirit, Enzo Angiolini, and Naturalizer. You can buy one shoe at a time, or pairs in different sizes. The second business, located in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, only sells single shoes. They have a slightly wider selection—and that's not a shoe joke.

In addition to those two mail-order companies, there's the National Odd Shoe Exchange, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Chandler, Arizona, that offers footwear for people requiring single shoes or pairs of differing sizes. Since 1943, the organization has been matching shoes donated by supporters with people who need differently sized shoes because of injury, disease, or genetic disorders. Some recipients are polio survivors.

According to a 1996 article in the *International Herald Tribune*, the exchange counts 17,000 members and has helped tens of thousands of people with uneven feet—or only one foot. "The exchange's cramped offices overflow with one million shoes donated by manufacturers," the article says. "Many of the shoes are manufacturers' overstocks. Some have slight defects, but most are in perfect condition."

One study indicates that as many as one third of Americans have a difference of half a size between their feet. For people with a minor size difference, most commercially sized shoes probably suffice. For those with bigger differences, club foot, or another condition, finding pairs of shoes that fit can be a challenge.

Getting shoes down once they've been thrown over an electrical wire can be another challenge entirely. In a 1996 *Straight Dope* column by Cecil Adams, the writer indicates that shoes thrown over electrical wires can either be a sign that drugs are sold nearby, that a neighborhood gang is active (or a gang member recently died), a childish prank, or a fun way to get rid of old shoes.

Mahatma Gandhi had his own way of getting rid of shoes. As the story goes, Gandhi once lost a

sandal while boarding a train. As the train picked up speed, Gandhi removed his other sandal and threw it toward the other. "Why would you throw your sandal out?" someone asked. Gandhi replied: "Why would I keep it and waste it when someone could have a pair?"

Having done the research mentioned above, I sent the information about the sources for mismatched shoes to the *Letter Exchange* reader. She replied: "Last summer, I purchased [two] pairs of inexpensive shoes and wear one of each size for considerable more comfort. They lack the support needed for longer time of wear. Am 82 and do not own a computer. Still have much to do before I leave this earth."

Don't we all. Mismatched shoes and otherwise.

A Conversation with the Bundle

Holiday wishes to everyone in the AAPA, actively publishing, writing, and printing, and otherwise. I enjoyed everyone's holiday cards and other inserts. This was the first year my wife and I did Christmas cards jointly, so they're of special interest to me. Together, we sent about 90. We mailed them Saturday and have already started to get a few in the mail ourselves. This month's bundle effectively doubled the number of cards we've received so far. Happy holidays! May 2009 bring only the best.

Luckily, the bundle was *also* plump with actual submissions from members. This might be a bumper crop of things to read.

Given that I just introduced a lettercol and devote a section of *HT* to commentary on items in the bundle—I'll do this every issue to a certain extent—I was particularly interested in Mike O'Connor's *SpareTime* #41. I've been involved in zine and small press publishing for two decades now. One of the things that initially attracted me to zines and, later, online discussion forums and blogging—and, interestingly, now APAs (what goes around comes around)—was the conversational nature of the media. If I wanted to just do my own thing, I could just journal. I'm doing this to experiment with different kinds of writing and publishing, to receive a steady stream of similar efforts to digest and be energized by, and to engage in the collective conversation that our APA zines, like discussion forum or blog

posts, have. I might respond in *HT*, I might send you a letter, or I might email. If I don't comment on an item in a recent bundle, no offense is intended. It's not that I didn't like it, it's that I don't have anything to say in response right now. But count on me to be an active, engaged participant. I challenge you to strive to be likewise.

Kent Clair Chamberlain's *Oregon Orbiter* #1 was right up my alley. Welcome to the AAPA! I was last in Ashland, Oregon, in late 2001, not long after Sept. 11. I was just passing through between Seattle and Portland, and I stayed at a little motel on the edge of downtown (might have been the Manor). I remember walking the main drag and feeling quite at home at the intersection of forest and thinking life. While I couldn't read your sheet music clearly enough to play it on my tin whistle—I'll keep trying!—I appreciated the songs, as well as your poems. Will look forward to future issues!

I quite enjoyed the several editions of *Flimsie Excuse*. I know I look forward to contributing to my first *Ink Cahoots*. Who's J. Hill? And I think Mr. Liddle would enjoy the baseball zine *Zisk!*, which is available from my friend Mike Faloon at 801 Eagles Ridge Road, Brewster, NY 10509.

It was a kick to identify some fellow members of the AAPA and NAPA in this bundle. For a forthcoming issue of *Karma Lapel*, my item for the NAPA, I wrote, "Frank Hansche's *Confusion?* #1 was right up my alley. [Seems I might overuse that phrase!] I'm a big fan of abandoned infrastructure and appreciated his descriptions of lost ski areas in his home state. I was particularly interested in the Milwaukee Ski Bowl's connection to railroading. It's easy to forget how much the early days of rail—and later, highway—transportation did for the development of our country. I look forward to future installments." That still holds true. It was also good to see *Ohkee-Doekee* #42 again. My, how I liked its look and feel. Personally, I'm trying to do two separate publications, one for each APA. We'll see how long I can keep *that* up!

Mr. Hawes's "The Newspaper Debacle" in his *The Gator Growl* #137 hit a nerve for me. With *The Christian Science Monitor* going Web only and The Tribune Co. going bankrupt—if you can't keep the *Trib* in print, what can we do?—in recent weeks, what do you think the solutions are? That's one of the reasons I'm newly active in APAs. As much as I love the Net (I work for Google, even), I don't want things like APAs to go away, so I help support them by way of participation. I also read two newspapers a day and buy local papers when

I travel, although I skipped the *Dallas Morning News* when I was in Texas yesterday. It's clear the outlook is grim; what can we do?

I had to look Cornucopia, Wisconsin, up on a map. I grew up in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, and my parents now live in Eagle River, but Mr. Coughlin has them beat in the Up North department. I won't be too far away come Christmas – and will tip hat north and west. I look forward to future items from you, and I'm curious whether you'd be satisfied with any elected official (your concerns seemed more about the process and the whimsy of voters than they were about Obama or McCain). You, too, might be interested in the books I recommended to Mr. O'Connor in *HT #2*. Voters aren't necessarily rational actors!

Amateur Observer #4 is an inspiration and a delight. Frequently, I envy those of you who run your own presses. Mr. Snyder's item is a fine example of why. Thank you.

Hedge Trimmings #1? No comment.

Ewing Heath Row

By Caroline McNeill

hearing the wow
he threw on a wig
I wager when hot
hero hewn a twig
we who grin, hate
when I go, wreath
whoa with green
I gather new, how
I wag on whether
go in what, where?
he, we, with organ
he throwing awe
we won thigh, ear
we hint, grow a he
he, we, worth gain
I, he, grown wheat
we gather whino
he go win the war
hen wore hat wig
he wine warthog
ah, ewe-throwing
wagon herewith
weather hog win
hare-white gown
rehang woe wit
Heath reign, wow!



Editor's Note: The above anagram poem was composed by a colleague of mine for an interoffice Secret Santa exchange. It's the best present I can imagine. And it's printed with her permission.

Games People

In the last few months, my wife and I have become more interested in playing games. She does acrostics and Sudoku, and I'm recently interested in play-by-mail games. And we've been playing more games together at home.

Not long ago, we played a dice game called *On the Rocks* for the first time. The game is made by Boston-based Koplou Games, which offers a full line of dice and game accessories, including more than 1,200 standard and polyhedral dice. The game consists of three dice in a tube. They are standard dice, only instead of a one on one side, there's an image of a lighthouse. You could also play with normal dice. Just pretend the one is a lighthouse, and you're golden.

Once you pick who goes first by seeing who rolls higher, the game begins. The goal is to be the first player to reach 100 points. You can roll as many times in a row as you would like in a turn – players take turns – with the following caveats. If you roll one lighthouse, you get too close to the rocks and lose all the points you've earned in that turn. If you roll two lighthouses, you hit the rocks and lose all the points you've earned in the game – but you get to keep playing. And if you roll three lighthouses, you're on the rocks – you lose all of your points and are out of the game.

It's a fun game. Not too fast paced, but it gets the pulse racing. And the risk of being too greedy as you keep rolling to accumulate points can be maddening. C. was on quite a roll one turn, earning almost 92 points, when she rolled two lighthouses and plummeted back to zero. Ouch!

Colophon

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