

## ***This is True's* Weirdest Stories of 2023**

by Randy Cassingham, Founder of *This is True*

**The *This is True*<sup>®</sup> Newsletter Publishes** “Weird-but-True” Stories from “legitimate, mainstream” news sources worldwide. It has been running weekly since 1994 — the oldest entertainment feature on the Internet. Each brief story identifies its source, and ends with a comment — a tagline which is humorous, ironic, or opinionated (or with luck, some combination of the three). If a subscriber sent this to you to see what the stories are like (which is absolutely OK!), I hope you’ll stop by the site for your own free email subscription: <https://thisistrue.com>

### **January**

**She Could Just Dye:** Nikki Mac dyes her own hair at home, and has done it many times, patiently wrapping it up in a plastic bag for half an hour. The problem this time for the 27-year-old from Devonshire, England, wasn’t the plastic, but that the supermarket’s name and logo was printed on it — in bright green — and that is what was against her head as the chemicals worked. That, and she was dying it for a night on the town. The “Asda” store’s name clearly was visible across her platinum blond head when she was done. “I had green hair,” she said. She was laughing so hard that her sister came running — “Lisa was crying with laughter” — and got video, which she posted online. “It was like that for a good few washes before it went back to normal,” Nikki said. So did she cancel her night out? Heck no: “We told everyone what happened and showed them the video.” (RC/Devon Live) ...*Rolling with it: so much better than hiding in the dark for a week.*



**Note That When Pictures Are Available,** they’re included with the story — usually fairly small, and with the ability to click to see them larger.

### **February**

**Falling Star:** A student at Rising Star (Texas) Elementary School found it, backed away, and ran to tell a teacher: there’s a gun in the restroom, the third-grader said. And there was: Superintendent Robby Stuteville carries a pistol openly at the city’s schools (so does the principal of the school, who also serves as principal at Rising Star Junior/High School across the street). When Stuteville used the restroom he took the gun off and set it down, then forgot to pick it up when he left. “There was never a danger other than the obvious,” Stuteville said. The school kept it hushed up for nearly two months — even from the police — but the story finally got out and unsurprisingly caused an uproar among parents. “For our kids’ protection, we need someone who is more responsible with a gun,” said one. As pressure mounted, Stuteville resigned. (RC/KRBC Abilene, Texas Tribune) ...*There was no option other than the obvious.*

## March

**Slapped Upside the Head the Right Way:** “To be abundantly clear, it is not a crime to give someone the finger,” scolded Judge Dennis Galiatsatos of the Court of Quebec, Canada, in a 26-page ruling. “Flipping the proverbial bird is a God-given, Charter enshrined right that belongs to every red-blooded Canadian,” he continued. “The complainants are free to clutch their pearls in the face of such an insult. However, the police department and the 9-1-1 dispatching service have more important priorities to address.” With that, “This injustice ends today,” he ruled, throwing out the criminal case against Neall Epstein, instigated by his neighbor, Michael Naccache, 34, who repeatedly called police on Epstein, calling the gesture “threatening.” Epstein was arrested and prosecuted for “criminal harassment and uttering death threats,” the judge observed. Galiatsatos further lectured that Naccache “consistently videotaped their neighbours,” and provided video “evidence” to the court showing the problem — including Naccache and his wife driving “dangerously near the [Epstein’s] children as a way to protest their presence.” Then, “With an irony of unmatched proportions, they complain that [Epstein] might have recorded them. He did not.” Prof. Andrew McDougall of the University of Toronto, an expert in constitutional law, commented that “If all the person did was simply put up the middle finger, it would be hard to read [it] as a threat.” (RC/Toronto Star) ...*Unless Naccache is willing to go on record as believing it was loaded.*

When there’s plenty more to say about a story, that’s when I’ll expand on things in my blog. In this case, I include Judge Galiatsatos’s full written decision, which is terrific reading, and, since I could find one, his photo. <https://thisistrue.com/slapping-judge/>

## April

**The Sudden Flood:** Phones lit up at the Montcalm County (Mich.) Central Dispatch Authority — the answering point for area 911 calls. An explosion at Dicastal in Greenville, callers reported. The company makes metal wheels for multiple automotive brands. Where exactly at the plant? “Back by maintenance,” the employee said — “same place it always is.” Investigators found a worker from China, who’d started two weeks ago at the plant, was using a grinder to free a stuck valve, and sparks from the tool landed in aluminum dust, causing the explosion. At least one employee was critically burned. The Dicastal plant “has a history” of safety violations, and fire officials say this was the fourth call for a fire at the plant — this year. (RC/WOOD Grand Rapids) ...*The pending lawsuit: the same courtroom it always is.*

**Each Issue Also Has** a Headline of the Week. A 2023 example:

<p>Well Thank Goodness That Worry is Behind Us <b>Robots Say They Won’t Steal Jobs, Rebel Against Humans</b> Reuters headline</p>
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## May

**Skewed:** Karina Gasparova, an IT project manager at essDOCS in London, England, a paperless document processing company, had a problem with her boss, Aleksander Goulandris. It all came to a head when Gasparova filed a sexual harassment lawsuit. Among the deeds Gasparova pointed to: Goulandris putting “XX” on a work assignment in red, which obviously meant he was wanting to kiss her, and “????” in other spots, clearly meaning he was asking her for sex. It’s unclear what she thought “YY” meant, also used in the document. Worse, she claimed, he renamed a file to “AJG”, which obviously meant “A Jumbo Genital” — that she should be “ready to engage in sexual acts.” Another time, an exasperated Goulandris demanded to know when she would be done with a task, shouting “I need a date, date, date!” which, of course, meant he wanted “the exact date when [she] would finally agree on sexual contact with him.” He then “retaliated” for her rejections by taking work projects away from her. After hearing the evidence, a tribunal ruled that “XX”, “YY”, and “????” were simply places where Goulandris needed Gasparova to provide information. “AJG” are his initials; demanding the “date” when she would turn in her work is simply a reasonable question. And because she was not getting her work done, removing her from various tasks was a reasonable business decision. The judge declared Gasparova regularly “skewed perception of everyday events,” leading to “extraordinary allegations without evidence, and she contradicted herself in a way that could not be attributable to a fallible memory.” Gasparova was thus not only not awarded any money, the judge ordered her to pay the company 5,000 pounds (US\$6,225) in damages. (RC/London Telegraph) ...*Wait until she interprets that this “all came to a head.”*

## June

**We Can Do It Until We Get Caught:** The Canterbury School, a private school in Lee County, Fla., had “no comment” when asked about Wyatt Henderson, a former Charlotte County sheriff’s deputy, who the school had hired as its head of security, because they “signed a waiver not to talk about it.” The problem is, Henderson is a convicted felon, and he was allegedly carrying a pistol at the school as part of his job. He allegedly said “No” on the gun permit application that asked if he had ever been convicted of a felony, but he has: he served prison time for pistol-whipping a child, and then tried to cover up the crime. That came out when the child’s father contacted a TV reporter to tell his son’s story. Henderson didn’t apply for the job: the school recruited him. The school finally released a statement saying student safety is their “top priority.” (RC/WINK Fort Myers) ...*Sure, NOW.*

Florida is well represented in *True*: it’s by far the weirdest state.

**An Extra 2023 Headline** since there’s room:

Seriously, Florida Man Really Is a Thing  
**Florida Man Arrested for Pooping on Dead Possum  
on Street During Rush Hour**  
WOFL Orlando headline

See what I mean about Florida being particularly weird?

## July

😬 : For more than a decade, South West Terminal Ltd. has bought grain from Achter Land & Cattle Ltd. in Swift Current, Sask., Canada. A SWT grain buyer texted farmers asking to buy 86 tonnes of flax for \$17 per bushel, and Chris Achter indicated he could. SWT texted a photo of the contract for delivery in November, as it had done with him numerous times in the past, and asked, “please confirm flax contract.” Achter replied with a “thumbs up” emoji. But prices for flax jumped to \$41 per bushel by November, and Achter didn’t deliver; SWT sued. The Court of King’s Bench has ruled that Achter breached the contract. “This court readily acknowledges that a 👍 emoji is a non-traditional means to ‘sign’ a document,” ruled Justice Timothy Keene, using the symbol in his written decision, “but nevertheless under these circumstances this was a valid way to convey the two purposes of a ‘signature’” as it indicates “express assent, approval or encouragement in digital communications” — according to Dictionary.com — and emojis are now commonly used in communications. Because the contract was valid according to law, there were “no genuine issues that require a trial.” Keene ordered Achter to pay \$82,200 (US\$62,150) in damages, plus interest. (RC/Canadian Press) ... 👍 .

## August

**Is That a Banana Spider in Your Pants?** A supermarket in Krems an der Donau, Austria, was hastily evacuated when a produce clerk opened a box of bananas and out popped a spider — a Brazilian wandering spider, or “banana spider.” The breed is highly venomous, with the repercussions of a bite including “extraordinary” pain and, for men, a prolonged erection. By the time firefighters arrived the beast was nowhere to be found, hence the evacuation and subsequent sweep by an exterminator. The spider is an eye-catching black and red, and it’s about 4 inches long. (RC/London Independent) ...*Though most men describe it as 8 inches.*

## September

**The Third Time’s the Charm:** When we first met Ray “Reza” Baluchi, then 42 (“Can You Walk on Water?” in *This is True* for 12 October 2014), he was trying to jog around the outline of the mythical Bermuda Triangle — which is in the middle of the ocean — starting in Miami, Fla. How? By running inside a floating device that looks like a giant hamster wheel. He was rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard, which refused to also recover the conveyance. “The vessel itself poses concerns about navigational safety, stability and sea-worthiness,” the Coast Guard said at the time, and Baluchi, an immigrant from Iran, was fined \$10,000. By 2021, Baluchi, then 49, had built a new hamster wheel, but floated ashore in Flagler County, Fla., after failing to “run” from St. Augustine to New York. In around 24 hours, he had gone 34 miles — in the wrong direction. Baluchi, now 51, was found in the ocean again on August 26. This time, the Coast Guard found him in his hamster wheel 70 nautical miles east of Tybee Island, Ga. Where was he going? London, he said. That would require a stroll across the Atlantic, into the North Sea, and up the River Thames, a journey of more than 4,250 miles. Upset at being stopped, Baluchi allegedly threatened to kill himself with a 12-inch knife if the coasties wouldn’t leave him alone. When that didn’t work, he allegedly threatened to detonate a bomb onboard, which he eventually admitted was a hoax. He was arrested, and brought back to Miami. (RC/WOFL Orlando, Daytona Beach News-Journal) ...*Next time, make him walk.*

## October

**Gotcha:** Everyone knows scam victims in the U.S. are mostly found by spam emails and online popup ads, right? Yeah, not so much: put those together and then double it, and you're almost at the total from the real culprit: social media. "They can easily manufacture a fake persona," says Emma Fletcher, a data analyst for the U.S. Federal Trade Commission — "pretend to be you, and con your friends. They can learn to tailor their approach from what you share on social media." The biggest losses come from scammers pretending to be successful investors who jump in to suggest "investments" that turn out to be terrible. In the past two years Americans have reported losing \$2.7 billion from social media scams — and the real total is much higher since most don't report being ripped off. (RC/CBS) ...*Heck, one oblioviot alone lost multiple billions last year by blundering into buying Twitter.*

## November

**That Superior Attitude:** "Yes. I did it on purpose," Ruba Almaghtheh, 34, allegedly told police in Indianapolis, Ind. She drove her car into an "Israel school" as a "hate crime" to favor "her people back in Palestine" after watching TV coverage of Israel fighting back against Hamas attacks. There were people inside the building, including children, but apparently no one was injured. But Almaghtheh didn't do her research very well: investigators say her target, the Israelite School of Universal and Practical Knowledge, is not a school for Jews, but rather a meeting place for an "extreme and antisemitic" hate group. (RC/WXIN Indianapolis) ...*I sure hope the detectives had a camera pointed at her face as they told her.*

## December

**World of Wonder:** A Disneyland guest on "It's a Small World" said a man in one of the boats jumped out mid-ride and took off his clothes. The ride was stopped for safety while waiting for Anaheim, Calif., police to arrive to deal with the problem. The unnamed 26-year-old man was arrested for indecent exposure, and taken to a hospital for evaluation. But to get the man to their car for transport, they had to carry him out through Fantasyland, and the man apparently didn't cooperate with officers' attempts to cover him. "Proper attire, including shoes and shirts, must be worn at all times," park rules state. (RC/KTLA Los Angeles) ...*Small World? With that cold water, he proved it.*

**So... What's the *Weirdest* of These 12 Stories?** See the next page!

## The Weirdest of 2023

### From July:

😬: For more than a decade, South West Terminal Ltd. has bought grain from Achter Land & Cattle Ltd. in Swift Current, Sask., Canada. A SWT grain buyer texted farmers asking to buy 86 tonnes of flax for \$17 per bushel, and Chris Achter indicated he could. SWT texted a photo of the contract for delivery in November, as it had done with him numerous times in the past, and asked, “please confirm flax contract.” Achter replied with a “thumbs up” emoji. But prices for flax jumped to \$41 per bushel by November, and Achter didn’t deliver; SWT sued. The Court of King’s Bench has ruled that Achter breached the contract. “This court readily acknowledges that a 👍 emoji is a non-traditional means to ‘sign’ a document,” ruled Justice Timothy Keene, using the symbol in his written decision, “but nevertheless under these circumstances this was a valid way to convey the two purposes of a ‘signature’” as it indicates “express assent, approval or encouragement in digital communications” — according to Dictionary.com — and emojis are now commonly used in communications. Because the contract was valid according to law, there were “no genuine issues that require a trial.” Keene ordered Achter to pay \$82,200 (US\$62,150) in damages, plus interest. (RC/Canadian Press) ... 👍.

### More on the Story

**The Story is Prime “True” Fodder**, showing how much things are changing in the world, and the obliquity of using modern communications tools to agree with something while simultaneously not thinking things through, all the way through pretending in court that an agreement is not an agreement. That’s where *This is True* comes in: it’s “Thought-Provoking Entertainment” by using true stories to not only point out the absurdities of humanity, but to give real-world examples of what the lack of thinking brings. Most are the kinds of stories you should insist your children (or grandchildren) should read to get lessons in the power of thinking, and the dangers of not doing so. Wouldn’t the world be a better place if kids got these lessons early?!

I also love that it’s the sort of stories that an emailed publication can tell well by using the emoji the court was considering. How modern! Though I have to admit it was a lot easier to do in HTML than it was in PDF....

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