

***This is True's* Weirdest Stories of 2016**

by Randy Cassingham, Founder of *This is True*

The *This is True*[®] 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

First Aid Merit Badge Completed: A Boy Scout troop was on an afternoon hike at the Splitrock Reservoir near Rockaway Township, N.J., when the troop’s leader, Christopher Petronino, 50, ducked into a cave. He disturbed a hibernating bear, who was unhappy with the rude awakening: the bear mauled him. Petronino, armed with a rock hammer, fought back while the boys waiting outside called 911 — but couldn’t describe exactly where they were. The bear eventually ran, and Petronino, the only one of the group who knew their exact location, got on the phone. He was helicoptered to a hospital, where he was treated for multiple bite wounds. (RC/New York Daily News) ...*While the boys were denied the badge for GPS Location Skills, that was made up for by getting the badge for Intelligence by sending the leader in first.*

February

Usually One Has to Hire a Taxi to Go This Far Out of the Way: When Noel Santillan, 28, arrived in Iceland from New Jersey, he rented a car and punched his destination into the car’s GPS navigation system: Laugarvegur. He actually wanted Laugavegur, a road in Reykjavik, where his hotel was — a very short distance from the airport. He apparently thought nothing of the 6-hour ETA, and after driving on some pretty dicey roads, he arrived in the absolutely wrong place. The hapless Santillan became a hero in Icelandic media: he liked Siglufjörður, his accidental destination, so much, he vacationed there, rather than return to Reykjavik. (RC/BBC) ...*Because he couldn’t spell Reykjavik well enough to punch it into the nav.*

March

One Time Around: “Please put all cigarettes out and put all clothes back on,” came the announcement over the intercom on the High Roller, the world’s largest Ferris Wheel, in Las Vegas, Nev. Each cabin on the 550-foot-diameter observation wheel can accommodate up to 40 passengers, but Cabin 16 only had two: a man and a woman who had undressed and were having sex, and (*gasp!*) apparently smoking on the attraction. With the request over the intercom the couple paused, but then went right back to it. “The guests in Cabin 15 not only noticed but were video recording the acts” with their cell phones, the police report notes. By the time the half-hour ride was over, the couple’s ride was over too — they were fully clothed. Chloe Scordianos, 21, of Hicksville, N.Y., and Philip Frank Panzica III, 27, of Houston, Texas, were charged with committing sex acts in public, which is a felony in Nevada. The wheel, at the Caesar’s casino, is billed as “The Happiest Half Hour in Vegas!” (RC/Las Vegas Review-Journal) ...*For once, something in Vegas that’s not over-hyped.*

April

Won the Battle, Lost the War: “How did this happen?” demanded Ontario (Canada) Superior Court Justice Alex Pazaratz. The judge was upset at a divorced Toronto couple who spent \$500,000 (US\$383,000) in legal fees in a child custody fight. Judge Pazaratz noted that before the case started, the father had begged his ex-wife by email to just “be reasonable” and let him see their daughter, rather than spend \$40,000 or \$50,000 on lawyers “only to have a judge tell us something we could arrange ourselves.” She apparently ignored that suggestion, instead “poisoning” the girl against her father, and “manipulating and falsifying evidence” against him, the judge said, leading to a 36-day trial. “No matter what costs order I make, the financial ruin cannot be undone,” Pazaratz lamented when it was over. “They’ll never recover. Their eight-year-old daughter’s future has been squandered.” He gave full custody to the father, and ordered the mother to pay \$192,000 of his legal costs. “Nasty doesn’t work,” the judge concluded. “Withholding the child doesn’t work. Sarcastic emails don’t work. Bad-mouthing the other parent doesn’t work.” (RC/Toronto Sun) ...*You know what works? Putting the kids first.*

May

Instruments of Math Instruction: A swarthy man with a foreign accent boarded an American Airlines flight from Philadelphia, Pa., to Syracuse, N.Y., and, once seated, pulled out a notepad and started writing strange symbols. The woman in the next seat didn’t like the looks of that: she handed a flight attendant a note expressing her concerns. After a long wait, the plane turned around and went back to the gate: the swarthy man was escorted off the plane and, after some questioning, was told he was suspected of being a terrorist; his seatmate had noticed his scribbles in his notebook. He laughed. Guido Menzio — he’s Italian — is an award-winning economist who has worked at Princeton and Stanford’s Hoover Institution, and is now an economics professor at the University of Pennsylvania. The notebook? He was working on the math for his latest paper on differential price-setting. After a two-hour delay, Menzio, 40, was allowed to reboard the flight so he could present his paper at a conference. The woman did not take the flight. (RC/Washington Post) ...*You can’t really blame her: after all, he was using Arabic numerals.*

June

Man of Steal: A discount store in Leesburg, Fla., called police to report a galloping horse kiddie ride in front of the store had been stolen. Security camera video showed that a man dragged it away by its power cord. The man, dressed in a Superman shirt, was found nearby, and Cesar Alexis Diaz, 27, was charged with petit theft, criminal mischief, and (wait for it!) molesting a vending machine. Diaz told police that he had been threatened by a man over money, so he broke the coinbox open and gave the man \$40 in quarters. (RC/Leesburg Daily Commercial) ...*And that’s how Lex Luthor got his start.*

Each issue also has a Headline of the Week. A 2016 example:

Yeah, That’s Considered a Clue
**Bank Manager Runs from Branch as Investigators
Discover Cash Missing from Vault, Deputies Say**
South Florida Sun Sentinel headline

July

Sleeping Sentinel: When a man in Washington D.C. was shot, witnesses named a suspect. Yet that suspect had a GPS tracking device attached to his leg which showed he was at home, a mile away, at the time of the killing. And, in fact, tracking records showed that “the device barely moved” ...for 72 hours. Yes, when police checked, the device was still attached to Quincy Green’s leg — it would have alerted them if it had been tampered with — but the leg wasn’t attached to Quincy Green: he simply removed his prosthetic leg and used a spare one to get around untracked. “I don’t understand how someone could put this device on a prosthetic leg,” said D.C. Police Sgt. Matthew Mahl. A spokesman for Sentinel Services, the company that provides the tracking devices, said the technician hadn’t realized Green’s leg is artificial, and didn’t follow procedures. Green, 44, who was on release pending his trial for an earlier gun crime, has been charged with murder. (RC/Washington Post) ...*His defense won’t have a leg to stand on.*

August

Doesn’t Have a Clue: A man saw a woman park an SUV at a trailhead in a “rugged area” of Park County, Wyo. He noticed she didn’t seem equipped for a hike, and was concerned when he noticed three days later that the SUV still parked in the same spot. He notified the sheriff, who launched a search and rescue operation. They knew who they were looking for: Madilina Taylor, 41, of Lynchburg, Va., was the registered owner of the vehicle, and the same woman they had rescued in the same area twice before in the past three years. Taylor has been looking for “millions of dollars” in “treasure” supposedly hidden by art dealer and author Forrest Fenn, who wrote a book about hiding treasure somewhere in the Rocky Mountains “north of Santa Fe,” N.M., but south of the Canadian border. The previous two times Taylor needed medical care after her rescue. This time, she simply drove away once she got out of the backcountry. Fenn, 84, admits “one or two” treasure hunters get lost looking for his treasure every year, but “most” are found alive. “It’s always a concern but what do you do about that?” Fenn said. “A man goes hunting in the woods and gets lost, who do you blame? The man? The game? The fish? Who?” (RC/Billings Gazette) ...*The secret title of his book: “How to Flush Out Obliviots for Fun and Profit”.*

September

Sure Enough, There Are Two Suspects: Meghan Haley of Philadelphia, Pa., noticed one of the digits on the address number sign on her home was missing. She checked her security camera and sure enough, a woman had come up on her porch to steal it — just one digit, a zero. “It has no value so I can’t imagine what they are using it for,” she says. Yet it’s part of a rash of such thefts in the area, and police are investigating: around 20 homes are missing digits, all zeroes and ones. “I saw a big power drill and a man stealing the number,” says another victim. “It’s kind of weird,” said yet another. “I don’t know if someone is trying to send a message or someone just has an obsession with zeros and ones.” (RC/WTXF Philadelphia) ...*There are 10 types of people in the world: those who understand binary, and those who don’t.*

October

You Go, Girl! For Halloween this year, little girls are shunning the long-popular princess costumes. Only 6 percent of children say they want to be a princess this year, while 20 percent want superhero costumes. And that not only goes for little girls: they're popular for adults and even pets, says Lorenzo Caltagirone, owner of a costume shop in Arlington, Va. "The female superhero in particular has really taken off," he says. "This is the year of girl power." Popular superhero movies are driving the trend, Caltagirone says, "But then again, who doesn't want to be a superhero? Halloween is the one day of the year you can get away with it." Caltagirone expects Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton costumes will also be very popular. (RC/Washington Post) ...*Well sure: superheroes need evil enemies to fight against.*

November

How to Turn Kids Against School: "She's always trying to share things," says Ronald Souto of Pembroke Pines, Fla., about his 11-year-old daughter. She had a peach in her lunch at Silver Trail Middle School, and a friend asked for half. The girl used a knife from a flatware set that's marked safe for children 36 months or older — otherwise known as a "weapon," according to school officials quoting zero tolerance policies. "This is a set of a spoon, fork and knife for toddlers," sputters the girl's mother, Andrea Souto. "It is made for children to learn how to eat properly. She's used it since she was baby." No matter: the school suspended the honor-roll student, and called in the police. Incredibly, the police department referred the case to state prosecutors, so the family has hired a lawyer. Ronald Souto says the girl is "afraid now of the educators. She's afraid of people at school." (RC/WPLG Miami) ...*Ridiculous school rules: a much more dangerous weapon, yet wielded without penalties.*



Note That When Pictures Are Available, they're included with the story — usually fairly small, and with the ability to click and see them larger. The photo here is apparently of the same kind of set designed for 3-year-olds that the school freaked out over when an 11-year-old girl had them. The horror!

December

Newspeak — Iron Bar Hotel Division: In the early 2000s, the Washington State Department of Corrections dropped the word "inmate" in favor of the more friendly "offender." But now that word is tainted. "Unfortunately, what starts out as a technical term, used to generically describe the people in our care, becomes and is enforced as a stereotype," wrote DOC Acting Secretary Richard Morgan in a memo to staff. "This is something we can address." Instead of "offender," he has directed staff to call the "people in our care" different words depending on where they're being held: "students" if they're taking classes, "patients" if they're in the infirmary. Otherwise, just "individuals" will do. The DOC says the trend started in Pennsylvania. (RC/Seattle Times) ...*And thus the demonization of the "individual" has begun.*

So... What's the Weirdest of These? Next page, please!

The Weirdest *This is True* Story of 2016

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More on the Story

The Story is Prime "True" Fodder for showing the utter obliivociy of the unthinking fear our politicians have sown in regular people. That's where *This is True* comes in: it's designed to be "Thought-Provoking Entertainment" — using stories like this to not only point out the absurdities of humanity, but to give our kids real-world examples of people being stupid and the consequences they suffer. That is a great way to help children develop common sense!

Dr. Menzio said his experience was "unbelievable," and he was shocked when he was asked to get off the plane only to be "met by some FBI looking man-in-black." He had thought that they were going to ask him about his seatmate's "illness" — the flight attendant had asked the woman if she was OK, or "too sick" to fly, after she passed her note. The woman was too stupid to take the hint: she assured the flight attendant she was OK. The airline called in the authorities anyway, leading to Menzio's interrogation. "They tell me she thought I was a terrorist because I was writing strange things on a pad of paper. I laugh. I bring them back to the plane. I showed them my math."

Menzio told the *Washington Post* that he was "treated respectfully throughout" the incident, but is perturbed by a system that "relies on the input of people who may be completely clueless." And that's why I like the story so much: it beautifully illustrates not only the lack of intelligence and education that practically defines the United States these days, but mixes in a bit of paranoia ("brown people must be terrorists!"), a measure of racism, and how just being smart is considered unusual these days.

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