

***This is True's* Weirdest Stories of 2017**

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

What Could Go Wrong? After a derailment of a Washington D.C. Metro train, track problems were the chief suspect. Investigators started talking to the track inspectors: policy requires tracks to be inspected twice a week, but many of the track inspectors couldn’t even answer basic questions about what their jobs entailed. Their inspection reports were falsified, investigators say. About half of Metro’s inspectors and supervisors have been fired, suspended without pay, or demoted due to “years” of “a disturbing level of indifference, lack of accountability, and flagrant misconduct,” says Metro General Manager Paul Wiedefeld. He also noted that no one turned off power to the electric third rail when the derailed train was evacuated, as emergency procedures dictate, putting passengers and rescuers at dire risk. Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689 President Jackie Jeter plans to appeal the firings, since “what they’ve done is not necessarily falsification in their mind.” (RC/WTOP Washington D.C.) ...*Because pretending to do your job ought to be good enough.*

February

Jewelry: The heavily tattooed and pierced Ashley Glawe was relaxing at her home in Portland, Ore., with her pet ball python wrapped around her shoulders when the snake “lunged” toward her ear — or, more specifically, the wide piercing in her right ear lobe. It got stuck about half-way through. “I tried to get him out myself, and I knew I wasn’t going to be able to without hurting him,” she said later. She called 911, but firefighters couldn’t figure out how to get the snake out of her ear either, and she ended up at Portland Adventist Hospital. “They put string or something in between my ear and the snake and stretched my ear out more,” she said, which allowed them to pull the snake out without tearing her ear. (RC/KATU Portland) ...*Her chest tattoo already says it all: “This Too Shall Pass”.*



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. You can see this one full size on the blog entry on this story, at https://thisistrue.com/fashion_accessory/ — and yes, that really is what her chest tattoo says.

March

A Medium that's Rarely Well Done: Iowa State Sen. Mark Chelgren is pushing legislation to limit the number of Democrats state universities can hire as professors. When reporters looked at the bio on Chelgren's web site to see what he knew about education, they noticed he claimed he had a business degree from the Forbco Management School. What's Forbco? A company that used to operate a Sizzler steakhouse restaurant in southern California; Chelgren apparently simply was trained as a manager by the company. When that went public, Chelgren quickly deleted the claim from his bio; he has no college degree at all. (RC/NBC) ...*Typical politician: more sizzle than steak.*

April

The Search is Over — Let the Search Begin! Once Amy Robertson passed her interviews and background checks to become the principal at Pittsburg (Kan.) High School, student reporters at the *Booster Redux*, the school's newspaper, started working on a story to introduce her to the 900 students. When they checked, they found that the school Robertson claimed to get her Master's and Doctorate degrees, which qualified her for the \$93,000-per-year job, isn't a real school, but a "diploma mill" that sells degrees. Worse, they found that the previous school she had run, a private English language school in Dubai, received an "unsatisfactory" rating from the Dubai Education Authority every year for four years, until it was closed. "If students could uncover all of this," said student reporter Maddie Baden, 17, "I want to know why the adults couldn't." Once their article was published, Robertson quickly resigned. Superintendent Destry Brown announced the school will re-open the job posting. "Our goal is to find the best person to be our principal that we can find," he said. (RC/Kansas City Star) ...*Then put Miss Baden on the review committee.*

May

Exploited: In 2009, Vladimir Putin made gambling illegal in Russia, which led to a glut of cheap, used slot machines on the market. Some were snapped up not for underground casinos, but for study. "Russian hackers" were looking for weaknesses in the machines, and they found some, says Florida's Miami Herald. They developed a smartphone app to watch the computerized slot machines and indicate exactly when to hit the "spin" button to win. It works because the machines aren't really random: they use "pseudo-random" number generators instead. "The reason we call them 'pseudo' is that if you look at the stream of numbers they generate, they satisfy many of the qualities of randomness," says John Robison, author of *The Slot Expert's Guide to Playing Slots*. "But in the end, there are always patterns. It may be two billion times before the pattern repeats, but it's going to repeat." By exploiting that discovery, the "Russian hackers" have reaped millions from American casinos with what experts call "the most lucrative cheating scheme ever devised" against slot machines. (RC/Miami Herald) ...*If you think that's impressive, you should see what they can do with a voting machine.*

Each issue also has a Headline of the Week. A 2017 example:

<p>Peace and Love, Damn It! Police: Inmate Punches Inmate Who Wouldn't Pray with Him Lincoln (Neb.) Journal-Star headline</p>
--

June

Dance Around the Question: Police investigating at a house in Boynton Beach, Fla., were interrupted by a 3-year-old boy who wanted to show officers his toys. He opened his toy box and pulled out several items including books, and a pistol. An officer immediately realized the gun was real, and grabbed it. It was loaded including a round in the chamber, and the safety was off. Rosalyn Faniel, 34, presumably the boy's mother, said the gun wasn't hers, and didn't know it was there, but officers found a box of ammunition for the pistol on top of the fridge — and powder that tested positive for opiates. Faniel was arrested. And what were the officers there to investigate? "Possible child neglect." (RC/Palm Beach Post) ...*Confirmed.*

July

Where There's Smoke...: Firefighters in Killingly, Conn., were dispatched to a kitchen fire in an apartment. Once they got things under control, firefighters called in police: apparently, the resident was trying to dry a "large amount" of marijuana in the oven. Chad Michael Hustus, 21, of (really!) Furnace Street, was arrested and charged with possession of marijuana with intent to sell, and booked on \$10,000 bail. (RC/Norwich Bulletin) ...*That's pretty steep for burning a pot roast.*

August

Freak of Nomenclature, Destiny Division: Police in Vancouver, Wash., received a report of a possible assault in progress in a moving vehicle. They caught up with the car, and saw a woman passenger was apparently trying to get out of the vehicle, but the male driver wouldn't let her. The driver also wouldn't pull over for police, so a pursuit began. Because the woman was clearly in danger, officers didn't break off their pursuit when the driver crossed the state line into Oregon. The car had been reported stolen (a felony), and the level of "eluding" the police was also a felony, and the apparent kidnap would also obviously be a felony. Police in Oregon set out spike strips to pop the fleeing vehicle's tires, ending the pursuit. The 22-year-old driver, who has a rap sheet of four felony convictions, was arrested on multiple felony and misdemeanor charges. His name: Felony Hudson. (RC/KOIN Portland) ...*Which ought to be enough for his parents to be charged with a misdemeanor.*

September

Don't Play in Peoria: A man in Peoria, Ill., reported to police that someone broke into his home. Nothing was taken, but his trombone was damaged; the mouthpiece, in particular, was "pounded harshly." Not wanting his name or address used, the local newspaper agreed to call him "Sam." The 52-year-old newcomer to town, perplexed by the break-in, says he first played the 'bone in middle school, and had taken it up again recently, mostly playing "church music," he says, recently trying to perfect "What a Friend I Have in Jesus." But, he had to stop playing when someone assaulted his instrument. "Who does this?" Sam grumped. (RC/Peoria Journal-Star) ...*A neighbor who isn't a friend of Jesus.*

October

Wake-Up Call: The fire storm that burned down 1 in 20 homes in Santa Rosa, Calif., also took down a couple of “modular buildings” at Keysight Technologies. Inside: the collected archives of William Hewlett and David Packard — founders of the iconic Hewlett-Packard Co. in 1938, in a garage that’s “the Birthplace of Silicon Valley,” according to its Historic Landmark designation. The “irreplaceable” papers, which included photos, correspondence, and speeches by the two high-tech icons, were valued at \$1.9 million 12 years ago, with the appraiser saying the archive was “of the highest possible historical value” in the history of technology and business. Archivist Karen Lewis was brought in by H-P to build the archive. When she first saw the papers and photos, “I realized, ‘Oh my god, this is the history of Silicon Valley. This is the history of the electronics industry.’” She kept the archive in a humidity-controlled vault with a fire protection system, not a shed, where Keysight put it when it took over H-P’s electronics test and measurement business; Keysight apparently didn’t hire an archivist to protect the valuable asset. A Keysight spokesman brushed off criticisms, saying the company “took appropriate and reasonable steps” to safeguard the archives. “This is a sad, unfortunate situation,” spokesman Jeff Weber said. “This is a time to begin healing, not assign blame.” (RC/Santa Rosa Press Democrat) ...*If only H-P made document scanners, so that there wasn't a single copy of everything.*

November

Antisocial: A quiz given to sixth-graders at Woodson Middle School in Hopewell, Va., asked students to answer questions like, “What do you call a married man’s girlfriend?” and “What do you call the younger boyfriend of a much older woman?” The expected answers: “mistress” and “boy toy.” Other questions dealt with “trophy wives” and other adult topics, and parents took to social media to complain about the assignment. Superintendent Melody Hackney says the unidentified teacher “downloaded this worksheet from the Internet,” but declined to say what action would be taken, since “this matter has become a personnel issue.” Tara Sample, the mother of a girl who was given the worksheet, said “I was thinking maybe it’s a young teacher that’s inexperienced, but no...she’s an older woman [who] has been teaching for years.” (RC/WWBT Richmond) ...*Who apparently has made an uncomfortable discovery about her husband.*

December

Blockhead: Rescue crews in Wolverhampton, England, were incredulous after an hour-long rescue when ambulance crews called them for assistance. An unidentified 22-year-old man that fire crews called a “Youtube prankster” needed help. “He and a group of friends had mixed seven bags of Polyfilla, which they then poured around his head, which was protected by a plastic bag inside the microwave,” says West Midlands Fire Watch Commander Shaun Dakin. Polyfilla is essentially plaster. The boys quickly realized their buddy’s head was stuck, and at least had presence of mind enough to provide the lad with a plastic tube to breathe through. “The oven was being used as a mould, and wasn’t plugged in.” It took an hour to rescue the man from the oven — not counting the 90 minutes his friends worked on rescuing him themselves before giving up and calling for help. (RC/Wolverhampton Express & Star) ...*It’s a pretty big turkey that needs 2-1/2 hours in a microwave.*

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

The Weirdest *This is True* Story of 2017, from January:

What Could Go Wrong? After a derailment of a Washington D.C. Metro train, track problems were the chief suspect. Investigators started talking to the track inspectors: policy requires tracks to be inspected twice a week, but many of the track inspectors couldn't even answer basic questions about what their jobs entailed. Their inspection reports were falsified, investigators say. About half of Metro's inspectors and supervisors have been fired, suspended without pay, or demoted due to "years" of "a disturbing level of indifference, lack of accountability, and flagrant misconduct," says Metro General Manager Paul Wiedefeld. He also noted that no one turned off power to the electric third rail when the derailed train was evacuated, as emergency procedures dictate, putting passengers and rescuers at dire risk. Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689 President Jackie Jeter plans to appeal the firings, since "what they've done is not necessarily falsification in their mind." (RC/WTOP Washington D.C.) ...*Because pretending to do your job ought to be good enough.*

More on the Story

The Story is Prime "True" Fodder by showing not just the rationalization for stupidity, but then using so much energy to defend the indefensible. *True* is designed 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!

Washington Metro's Office of Inspector General found that track inspectors would copy and paste old reports onto new ones, and use archive photos to show "current conditions." There was also a report in 2015 that found "there is no uniformity on how things are done in the field; each inspector does things his own way. Each inspector is reporting what they see, but everybody may see the same thing differently. There are no real procedures in place concerning how to complete an inspection."

The problem went on for years: the 2015 report was apparently done because a whistleblower had come forward in 2013 to report the inspections were being falsified, but upper management apparently didn't do anything about the charges — until the train derailed due to a bad track that should have been caught long before.

Several of the fired inspectors are suing Metro, saying they were scapegoated, and in December, 16 of the fired inspectors won an appeal allowing their firings to go before arbitrators. The process is expected to take many months, and it's possible some may get their jobs back.

For More Stories like these Every Week, basic subscriptions are free at <https://thisistrue.com>. If you *really* like the stories, upgrade to the "Premium" edition: it has many more stories than the free edition, no outside ads, and other benefits. Details on that can be found at <https://thisistrue.com/upgrade/>. Enjoy!

This Document Is Very Similar to the Premium edition: about a dozen stories (always at least 10), and a headline of the week. The free "basic" edition has five stories (and the headline of the week).

©2017, 2018 Randy Cassingham, All Rights Reserved. **This document may be shared** if *unchanged* and no fee is charged.