

The
**Honest
Truth**

Real Happenings
Far Funnier than Fiction

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The Honest Truth: Real Happenings Far Funnier than Fiction

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Humor

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1. Life After Death

(Same as Before)

In 2019, a sixty-one-year-old man serving life imprisonment in Iowa argued in court that his sentence should be over. The fellow had a major seizure in prison, during which he suffered a cardiac arrest, from which he was successfully resuscitated. As such, he insisted he had died, however briefly, and therefore his sentence had been served. He should now be free to leave.

Judge said “no.”

See: Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, “A Prisoner Who Briefly Died Argues that He’s Served His Life Sentence,” *New York Times*, November 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/08/us/prisoner-dies-life-sentence.html> (accessed December 27, 2022).

21. Rotten Luck

A doctor friend of mine described how, while he was away on vacation, a blind patient of his sought a note for getting out of jury duty. The gentleman made an appointment with one of my friend's colleagues who himself happened to be blind. The blind doctor was offended by the thought. "Excuse? No way! I can offer a request for reasonable accommodation, but not a total excuse."

The poor man really picked the wrong day to get out of jury duty.



31. Thoughts on a Boo-Boo

Sharon lived across the apartment building's courtyard from me when we were in grad school in 1978. As a single mom in her mid-30s, she balanced academics with raising her three-year-old son, Ralphie. She told me one day how the boy had run to her crying, having dropped the toilet seat on his penis. There was no significant injury, but the boo-boo obviously hurt.

Ralphie asked his mom to kiss it, as she had done for all prior boo-boos elsewhere. Sharon declined, which was likely upsetting, though Ralphie recovered without physical or emotional scars.

If you were Sharon, would you have kissed the boo-boo?

38. Life and Death via Lottery

On December 1, 1969, the US military's Selective Service, commonly known as the Draft Board, held its first lottery since World War II. All previous exemptions were cancelled; until then, college students had been able to defer service, while those from more disadvantaged backgrounds made up the bulk of the military (and its deaths during Vietnam). The Draft Lottery sought to make dying in war fairer.

Fairer perhaps in that all men were treated equally (no women were drafted at the time), but not exactly. As one statistician described such a lottery, "There are two ways to go about it. You can be certain of being random by picking a table of random numbers, [which] can be found in just about any statistics textbook ... Or you can have a show and use a fishbowl." The army opted for the latter.

Their process involved stuffing plastic capsules with papers bearing birthdates, combining them in a big container, and then picking capsules out one by one, all in public view. Appears simple enough, but one seemingly small detail was botched, ultimately having an enormous impact on who got picked.

First, capsules with birthdates from January first to thirty-first were placed in a box and pushed to one side. Then the February capsules were dropped in the empty half and mixed with January's. Next came March, and so on. As a result, January birthdates were mixed eleven times, but November's were only mixed twice, and December's just once.

The box was then emptied into a two-foot-deep bowl—which nobody stirred. Various people reached in to pick out capsules one by one in public view; predictably, young men with December birthdays wound up being disproportionately drafted. After the process was criticized, the military went on the defensive, with a captain arguing that the capsules were mixed even more while the box was being carried up and down stairs. Most people drawing picked from the top, though some did reach into the middle or bottom of the bowl.

Maybe all's not fair in love and war.

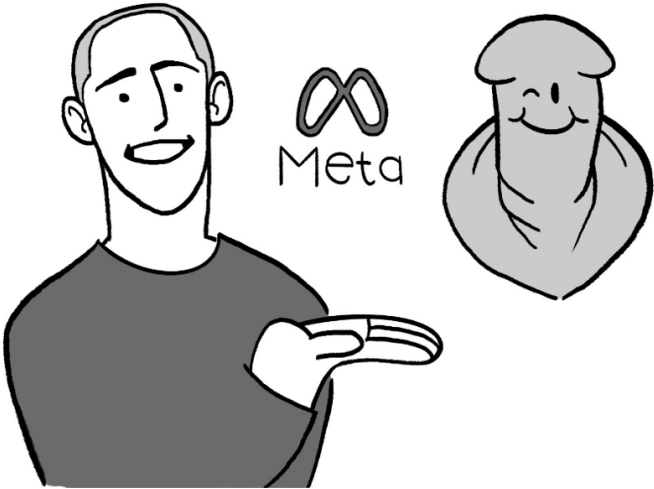
See: David E. Rosenbaum, "Statisticians Charge Draft Lottery Was Not Random," *New York Times*, January 4, 1970, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/01/04/archives/statisticians-charge-draft-lottery-was-not-random.html> (accessed December 27, 2022).

59. If Zuckerberg Only Knew

In 2021, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg announced to great fanfare the rebranding of the company to “Meta,” standing for the Metaverse—a virtual world where people simulate “reality.” But for many years already, “meta” has been a common abbreviation in the transgender community for “metoidioplasty,” the surgical procedure of enlarging the clitoris to create a penis for transgender female-to-males. Less invasive than the larger “phalloplasty,” or “neo-penis,” the “meta” also retains clitoral sensation and can achieve orgasm.

Hopefully the transgender community will feel complimented by Mr. Zuckerberg’s coopting of their term. And hopefully Facebook will feel equally proud.

See: deadaccount22, “The Surgery,” *Accidentally Gay*, February 19, 2017, <https://accidentallygay.com/2017/02/19/the-surgery/> (accessed April 25, 2023).



100. The Greatest Invention

If you ever buy a can of Guinness stout, you may wonder why there's a little ball inside, rocking back and forth. The widget, invented in 1989 after years of research, contains nitrogen and is primed to burst when the can is opened. This creates a foamy head just like you'd get from Guinness on tap. It received the Queen's Award for Technological Achievement in 1991.

In 2003, in an informal online poll, 48 percent of almost 9,000 respondents voted the widget to be the most impressive invention of the last forty years. Second place went to the internet and email, with only 13 percent. Microwaves, contact lenses, and plastic surgery all scored much lower.

See: Chris Murphy, "Er, the Widget; The Greatest Invention of the Past 40 Years Is..." *Free Library*, November 10, 2003, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/ER%2C+THE+WIDGET%3B+The+greatest+invention+of+the+past+40+years+is..-a0109977524> (accessed June 19, 2023).

Jess Hardiman, "Guinness Widget Once Won Award for Technological Achievement – Beating the Internet," *LAD Bible*, August 22, 2021, <https://www.ladbible.com/news/food-guinness-widget-won-technological-achievement-award-beating-internet-20210820> (accessed June 19, 2023).

130. Useful Warnings to Prevent Epidemics



A ladies' restroom at the Moscone Convention Center, San Francisco (courtesy of Leah Leiner, whose father, the author, doesn't troll such venues).