

What Are You Nuts?

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I dedicate this book to Carol, without whose cheerful companionship, Happy Hour, not to mention the rest of my life, would not be nearly as happy

This is a work of wild exaggeration. Names, characters, places and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictionally. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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Preface

What we have here is a collection of columns that appeared in The Gag Recap, a newsletter that recapitulates cartoons in publications in North America.

The columns are flights of fancy that have nothing to do with the real world or real people who exist in the real world.

References to the editorial offices of Gag Recap, Happy Hour at the Creek Side Inn and meetings of the Philadelphia Pickwick Club are jumping-off points for totally fictitious fables. I made everything up. None of the dialogue is even remotely true.

During the years I've been writing this stuff, there has been a great deal of turn-over in the bartenders and the participants at Happy Hour. For the sake of consistency, I've never changed the names of the make-believe participants in my make-believe versions of Happy Hour.

The bartender has forever remained Patty, because that was the name of the bartender when I started writing. The character on which Ollie the Oil Man was based moved to Wyoming years ago. The character on which Long Island Bob was based came to his senses and stopped attending Happy Hour. The character on which Delbert was based does not have, and never had a wooden leg. We rarely see the character on which Alaska Bill was based any more.

As to the Philadelphia Pickwick Club, the character on which Cedric Dickens, the great grandson of Charles Dickens, was based was Cedric Dickens, the great grandson of Charles Dickens.

When I sent Cedric a copy of the column about him he was so impressed that he fined me a bottle of port the next time he attended a P.P.C. meeting. Cedric has since passed on to his final reward.

The dog on which Spot was based also passed on to her final reward a couple of years ago and has been replaced by a dog named Sweeney. However, the name of the dog I write about at Gag Recap World Headquarters (GRWH) has remained Spot, because that was the name of the dog when I started writing.

If none of this makes much sense, I suggest you reread the title of the book. “What are you nuts?” is a rejoinder I hear a lot.

Bill Keough, M.P.P.C.

September 1999

Well, well, well . . . some pretty deep thinking

It was shortly after I fell down the well that Al Gottlieb called.

“I’m selling The Gag Recap. Make me an offer,” Al said.

I offered him my first-born. He said he already had a first-born of his own and didn’t know what he would do with mine.

I said I didn’t know what to do with him either, but ear plugs seemed to help when he and his band jacked up their amplifiers. I offered Al a suitcase full of money. He said he’d take it.

I was about to explain this publishing opportunity to my wife, Carol, when she interrupted and asked why I was covered with mud and had a nasty cut on my shin.

“I fell down the well,” I said.

We live in a farmhouse, high on a windy hill. When we moved in, we inherited an abandoned well — really nothing more than a hole about forty feet deep with water in the bottom of it.

It used to be covered with cement, but some fool ran over the cement with a ride-on lawnmower and cracked it. To stop people from falling down the well, I covered the cracked cement with a wooden dartboard. That was about five years ago.

Meanwhile, leaves and debris covered everything. So I had no idea where the well was when I fell down it.

Carol was not amused by this.

“You could have been killed,” she said. “You should have covered up that well years ago.”

“I thought the dartboard covered it,” I said. “It was over an inch thick.”

“It was wooden,” she said. “Wood rots. How did you get out of the well, anyway?”

Actually, that part was easy. As the earth opened up beneath my feet, and a sinking feeling alerted me that I was being swallowed up by the very ground upon which I stood, I grabbed onto the edge of the well as it went by.

If Alice had done this when she fell down the rabbit hole, she never would have discovered Wonderland.

“I caught onto the ground as I was falling,” I said. “Just think: If I’d fallen all the way in, I might have become Bill in Wonderland.”

“You’ve got to cover it up,” she said. “Someone could be killed. If one of the neighbors heads for Wonderland, we could be sued.”

“I don’t have any more dartboards,” I said.

“It has to be a real cover this time,” she said. “You have to recap with cement or something.”

“Which reminds me,” I said. “Al Gottlieb called to say he’s selling The Gag Recap.”

“What’s that?”

“A national newsletter that recaps cartoon gags in magazines.”

“WHAT ARE YOU NUTS? You don’t need Gag Recap. You need well recap.”

“You’re absolutely right,” I said. “I think I’ll get both — a new cap for the well and a newsletter that recaps cartoon gags.”

And so I did. I also used my wife’s idea for the title of my new monthly column.

Fall’s well that ends well!

October 1999

A name by any other name wouldn't be the same name

How hard could it be? I asked myself upon taking over the responsibility for producing The Gag Recap each month.

If I could type half as fast as Stephen King, I could wrap up the nitty gritty of describing the cartoons during halftime of Monday Night Football and move on to my lofty editorial comments.

Summing up the essence of the cartoons proved to be a piece of cake—or *morceau de gateau* as they say along the *Rive Gauche*. No sweat. *Pas de perspiration*.

But The Gag Recap also includes the name of the cartoonist with each of the cartoons it describes.

You would think that talented cartoonists, able to render all manner of complex, humorous fare, from raging waterfalls to talking dogs and fire-snorting dragons, would be able to sign their names legibly.

There's the guy who uses something that looks like porcupine entrails to identify himself. I spent 10 minutes studying this. I got a magnifying glass and spent 10 minutes more.

If Stephen King had to do this, it would take him at least a month to write one of his novels, instead of the usual two weeks.

I took the cartoon to my wife, Carol, handed her the magnifying glass and asked if she could figure out what the name was. "Looks like some form of road kill," she said. "Could it be 'possum guts?'"

And that was one of the more legible signatures. My proctologist writes with more clarity than some cartoonists. Matter of fact, Carol looked at one signature and said:

I didn't know Dr. Wackinhammer drew cartoons."

She looked at another one and said, "This looks like one of the specimens you take when you go to see Wackinhammer for a physical."

I took some of the cartoons to Happy Hour at the Creek Side Inn and showed them to Long Island Bob, our local expert on the eternal mysteries of life."

"I think this one was drawn by Al Capp," Long Island Bob said.

"Al Capp is dead," I explained.

"Well, from the way he signs his name, I knew he was at least terminally ill."

To compound the problem, the Sun is trying to see how many cartoons it can fit on the head of a pin. At last count it was seven. The drawings were so small it was hard to tell the difference between a cartoon of a bride and groom and one of a kid showing his report card to his dad. It took an electron microscope to make out the signatures."

What we have here seems to be confusion between the practices of calligraphy and cryptography.

Deciphering the Rosetta Stone would be easier than decoding these *noms de cartoons*.

If the Japanese had put cartoonists in charge of their communications, the United States never would have cracked their code during World War II.

If John Hancock had been a cartoonist, the English would still be trying to figure out his signature on the Declaration of Independence.

Egyptians had hieroglyphics. Cartoonists have cartoon-oglyphics.

Solving the riddle of the Sphinx would be easier than solving the riddle of cartoon credits.

Here's a pop quiz for you:

Penmanship is (a) Inmate deportment aimed at getting time off for good behavior; (b) The behavior of a pig wallowing in a sty; (c) The art of writing clearly.

Here's a clue: It has nothing to do with convicts in prison or pigs.

But enough of my frustrations.

Let me simply ask that in the future you try to mind your Ps and Qs — or at least try to write so I can tell the difference between them.

November 1999

'Tis a far, far better thing I do now

Bill, what does M.P.P.C stand for?"

— Don Rizzi, Alameda, California

CLANG-A-BLANG-A-BLONG-A-BLANG!

The bell rings out with the same jarring urgency sounded to arouse the hook-and-ladder crew of Engine Co. 47.

It's not unlike the alarm used to alert the staff of the local insane asylum that one of the deranged inhabitants has bolted.

Actually, the bell signals the start of another meeting of the Philadelphia Pickwick Club.

The Members of the Philadelphia Pickwick Club (M.P.P.C.) gather in the bar of the Dickens Inn about an hour before their meeting to fortify themselves with a few libations.

Throughout the process, the members of this august organization inspired by Charles Dickens proffer such Dickensian quotes as, "Please, sir, I want some more," punctuated by an occasional literary toast:

"To the apostrophe!" "Hear, hear, to the apostrophe!"
"To the colon!" "Hear, hear, bottoms up!"

Each club member is assigned the name of a character from Dickens' "The Pickwick Papers."

Because of its importance, the name of Whiffin, the bell-ringer, has been assigned to an equally important member — me.

“The chair calls on Jonas Mudge to table the papers,” says Chairman Pro Tem Blotton of Algate.

Jonas Mudge steps forward and places a copy of Dickens’ first novel on the head table.

If you didn’t know this was happening, you might miss it. Mudge is well over four feet tall, but his diminutive stature makes his comings and goings elusive to the unpracticed eye.

“Point of order!” cries Jingle. “May we toast the queen and the president.?”

It’s a club rule that no one can get up to pee until after the toast to the queen and the president.

Jingle, the tallest member, has the weakest bladder.

“Your point of order is out of order,” says Blotton. “That will cost you a bottle of port.”

“He’s always out of order,” comes a shout from the back of the room. “Make it two bottles.”

“Fine him three bottles!” “May we toast the queen and the president now?” persists Jingle.

“Sit down!”

“Hold your water!”

Cries castigating Jingle fill the room. Blotton strives for order:

“WHIFFIN!”

CLANG-A-BLONG-A-BLANG-A-BLANG-A-BLONG!

“SILENCE!”

Of course, the ringing of the bell and the call for silence causes more bedlam than the initial hue and cry over Jingle’s bladder. Dickens found this amusing.

The appreciation of the humor of the bell seems to diminish in direct proportion to the proximity of your eardrums to this implement of mirth.

“The chair will fine Jingle two bottles of port,” says Blotton. Huzzahs and cheers. “It will fine Smouch, Funky and Skimpkin one bottle each for speaking without permission!” More cheers.

The Benevolent Clergyman of Dingley Dell is called on to say grace. He tells of Dickens’ complaint to an innkeeper that he was suffering from writer’s block.

“A martini should solve that,” said the innkeeper.

“Capital idea!” said Dickens.

“Olive or twist?” asked the innkeeper.

“Eureka!” cried Dickens.

“That will cost you a bottle of port,” says Blotton.

Leek & potato soup is served Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding follows. Blotton finally proposes a toast to the queen and the president.

This is followed immediately by a mad dash to the loo by the entire assemblage.

Cigars and clay pipes are passed out. Bottles of port are poured. It is more than a coincidence that the club ties are the precise shade of dark red as port wine. Any spillage is virtually undetectable.

The club meets only three times a year in order to help preserve the longevity of the members’ livers.

And to think this all came about because a cartoonist had some funny drawings of a sporting club and his publisher asked Dickens to write something to go with them.

Why, without the Philadelphia Pickwick Club, its members would just be a conglomeration of louts sitting about, eating too much and drinking to excess, with no higher literary purpose in life. And I wouldn’t have any initials to put after my name.

But enough about M.P.P.C. Next month: Boxers or briefs?

December 1999

Are we Y2K compliant? You bet!

“**Y**AAGH!!!”
I hate it when the company president screams like that.

“What’s the matter, Carol?” I asked.

“Someone put cinderblocks in the refrigerator.”

“Oh, you noticed,” I said. “That’s part of our Y2K readiness plan. “We’ve also got a brick in our toilet tank and a couple of bricks in the company car’s gas tank. Bring on the millennium. We’re ready.”

“What are you nuts?” she queried.

Not at all, I explained. Whenever there’s a drought, we’re advised to put a brick in the toilet tank to save water.

Now, with the approach of Year 2000, we’ve been warned of impending shortages of not only water, but gasoline, food, heat, electricity and e-mail.

“That way we save food. When the food shortage hits, we’ll be doing our part because we’ll need less food to fill the refrigerator. We’re saving gas too. It now takes fewer gallons to fill the gas tank.”

“But we’ll starve,” she said. “We can’t eat cinderblocks.”

“Pish tosh,” I replied. “You haven’t checked the bathtub in the last few hours.”

“You put cinderblocks in the bathtub?”

“No. That would be silly. I’ve filled the bathtub with enough doggies and noodles to feed us for a month.”

For those unfamiliar with doggies and noodles, it’s a delicious concoction of noodles, tomato and mushroom soup, sliced hotdogs and melted cheese slices.

“It took all afternoon,” I said, “but we won’t have to worry about what to eat until Valentine’s Day.”

“But we can’t bathe if the tub’s full of doggies and noodles.”

“Picky, picky, picky. We’ll have plenty of time for personal hygiene in the next century — after we’ve weathered the Y2K crisis. Here, put this on.”

“What is it?”

“It’s your tinfoil hat. I made one for each of us.”

“Tinfoil hat?”

“Of course,” I said. “Protection from any Y2K radiation. They also make it virtually impossible for Bill Gates to read our private thoughts.”

“Even our homicidal ones?” she asked. There seemed to be a slight edge to her voice. I also noticed she glanced at my softball bat.

“Absolutely,” I replied.

I took a step toward the back door as we put on our Y2K hats. “Tinfoil becomes you,” I said.

She seemed to make a small gargling noise and was moving toward the softball bat as I made my exit.

As a further condition of our Y2K readiness, I’ve started wearing a crash helmet under my tinfoil hat.

January 2000

The end of the world as we knew it

Aunt Maudie and Uncle Pudd arrived on Christmas afternoon with the usual fanfare of “Whoo ha!” and “Line up the shots!”

The genetic experiments they call their kids made a mad dash for the piano. Aunt Maudie ran to the powder room. Uncle Pudd dashed to the bar.

The boy genetic experiment launched into a Jerry Lee Lewis arpeggio on the lower half of the keyboard. The girl attacked the high notes with what could have been the “Anvil Chorus” or “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.”

Aunt Maudie added to the musicality of the moment with a series of violent vahbooms from the powder room that brought to mind the cannonade in the “1812 Overture.”

Uncle Pudd helped himself to a bowl of Smoking Bishop — a Pickwickian libation we serve each Yuletide.

Things were about to settle into the usual festive pandemonium when a piercing shriek from the powder room alerted us that Aunt Maudie was in distress.

“It won’t flush! It won’t flush! Oh, my god! HELP!”

Uncle Pudd ran to the rescue.

“GET A MOP!” cried Aunt Maudie.

“Stand back and let a man who knows how!” shouted Uncle Pudd. “I can mop with the best of them.”

“Great Balls of Fire” resounded from the piano along with what could have been either “Chopsticks” or —Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

“Shut off the water! It’s still overflowing!” exclaimed Aunt Maudie.

I ran down to the cellar and shut off the water. Uncle Pudd managed to mop up the mess on the powder room floor. The kids stopped hammering on the piano and started hammering on each other.

Which left us with the knotty enigma of how to deal with a houseful of people eating Christmas dinner without plumbing facilities.

“What are we going to do?” asked Carol, ever the gracious hostess.

“Not to worry, My Dear. I have the perfect solution,” I responded.

It was one of my usual strokes of genius. I spiked the eggnog with generous portions of Kaopectate and made sure everyone had at least two noggins of it.

With everybody sufficiently plugged up, we plunged ahead with the seasonal merriment, exchanging presents, opening stockings and wolfing down great slabs of turkey.

The next day we paid a plumber to unstop the drain and once again all was right with the world. This lasted until a week went by and the world ended.

Although the world as I knew it no longer existed when I awoke on New Year’s Day, it had been replaced by a new world that looked almost exactly the same.

The new bed in which I lay appeared nearly identical to my old bed. And the woman lying next to me looked very much like Carol. I gave her a tentative poke.

“Not now you beast! It’s too early!”

Hard to believe. Who would have thought my wife in the new world would respond to me the very same way the one in the old world did?

Happy New Millennium!

February 2000

Almost everybody's younger than somebody

Everyone thinks of themselves as old. I can remember back in Miss McGregor's fourth grade class, how mature we thought we were and what twerps we thought the first and second graders were

I remember turning 10. I considered this majorly significant because I had achieved double digits and my age could henceforth be measured in decades as well as years. God, was I old.

Sixteen was really, really old because I could drive a car. Twenty-one was indeed coming of age because I no longer had to use fake ID.

When I turned 30 a bunch of people gathered on a mountaintop on my birthday to watch the end of the world, and the power went off simultaneously in the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. A four-state blackout. That was a helluva milestone.

When I turned 60 my wife Carol gave me a balloon that said I was older than dirt.

I'm also old enough now that younger people occasionally ask me how I achieved such longevity. Funny you should ask.

Back when I was a mere tad of 40, I was on the rewrite desk of the now-defunct Philadelphia Bulletin. One day my fellow rewrite man, Adolph Katz, made the acute observation that orchestra conductors lived well into their 80s and 90s.

"Why is that?" mused Adolph.

"“Maybe waving your arms around all the time is good for you,” I ventured.

“Let's try it.”

So, between typing up stories about murder, mayhem and general-alarm fires, Adolph and I would stand up at our

desks at the Bulletin and wave our arms around as if we were conducting orchestras.

When I started writing newsletters, I told this story to Tom Hagy at Andrews Publications. We tried arm-waving between writing stints at Andrews, but the boss disapproved. Didn't think it looked productive.

.When my dad, a retired accountant, was in his 70s, he fretted over whether he should buy a \$75 racketball racket that would last 10 years or settle for a \$25 racket that might not last longer than a year. He opted for the \$75 racket.

That was over 20 years ago. Ten years ago he replaced the \$75 racket with a \$100 racket. He's still using that one. When he plays racketball, he waves it around a lot — not unlike an orchestra conductor.

But he hasn't stopped amortizing when he shops.

“When I go to the market I have second thoughts about buying economy-sized boxes of cereal,” he says. “I have to calculate whether I'm going to live long enough to eat all the cereal in one of those big boxes. Or should I buy a smaller box that will be gone in a week?”

My advice is that, no matter how old you are, you should send us \$100 for a two-year subscription to Gag Recap. Consider it an added incentive to keep living.

And wave your arms around a lot. It's worked for me, and I'm older than dirt.

March 2000

***The secrets of Long Life, botts
and crinkly toes***

You can't live forever, but it's worth a shot. With this in mind, I asked Cedric Dickens, the 84-year-old great-grandson of celebrated author Charles Dickens, if there was anything in his personal regimen that might explain his robust demeanor.

"Proper diet!" he proclaimed. "I start each day with a steaming bowl of porridge."

"Porridge? You mean the stuff Goldilocks stole from the three bears?"

"We call it oatmeal," my wife, Carol, interpreted.

"And on top of the porridge I pour a double shot of Jim Beam bourbon," Cedric continued. "Nothing like it. Gets your heart beating like a bass drum in a Polish polka band."

He also recommended taking liberal doses of a homemade elixir called Long Life. More on that momentarily.

Cedric speaks with a ruddy British accent, not unlike the one used by Dr. Watson when asking Holmes to explain his process of deductive reasoning. This led to some confusion when Cedric explained his cure for botts.

At first I thought he was talking about small mouse-like animals with wings.

"No, not bats — botts! To immunize yourself so you don't catch botts, you should drink plenty of dandelion wine."

"What sort of ailment is botts?" I asked.

"I have no idea. But since I've taken to drinking dandelion wine I've never had it — that's for sure."

He also volunteered his cures for gout and crinkly toes.

“My cure for gout is to marry a rich widow with a loud voice,” he said. “The hard part is finding one that’s rich. They all have loud voices.”

Which brings us to crinkly toes — an affliction that Cedric’s grandfather, Sir Henry Dickens, or Pupsey, sometimes complained of after fighting off botts all day and partying all night.

“We call it a hangover,” Carol interpreted.

“Angostura Bitters!” exclaimed Cedric. “Put a tablespoon of it in a tumbler of soda water and drink it first thing in the morning. It has a sobering effect and will cure depression, crinkly toes and whatever else ails you.”

But back to Long Life. I know you readers want to live long enough to receive your full two-year subscription, so pay attention.

Here’s Cedric’s recipe for the medicinal elixir, Long Life:

12 eggs

14 lemons

1 pint cream

1 bottle scotch or bourbon

1/4 pound of runny honey

Wash and dry the eggs and put them in an earthenware bowl with the juice of 14 lemons. Cover and leave for five or six days until the shells are completely dissolved. Whisk well and add cream, whiskey and honey. Pour into small bottles suitable for carrying in pocket or handbag.

“These small bottles carried in a pocket or handbag are a vital piece of equipment for everyday modern life,” Cedric said. “It is amazing how many emergencies there are in a day, and wonderful to see how quickly they disappear under this treatment.”

One small footnote: When Cedric tried to concoct a batch of Long Life while visiting Philadelphia, he couldn’t get the eggs to dissolve in the lemon juice.

“That’s because eggs in America have a thin coating of paraffin to keep them fresh,” Carol told him.

“Whoever heard of such a thing,” Cedric marveled. “You Americans never cease to amaze me, the way you do everything differently.”

But he amended his recipe to make it clear that the eggs should be “fresh from the hen.” Where you’ll find these I have no idea. (First you steal a chicken.)

But if you want to live a long life, you can always try a double shot of Jim Beam in your morning porridge.

It may lead to early onset crinkly toes. But you now know how to cure that.

April 2000

Plan A: Rich beyond our wildest dreams

“**W**hat about *our* golden years?” Carol asked.
“What about them?”

My wife and I were watching TV. They had just shown a commercial in which an old couple invites some good friends over and bounces them up and down on the sofa to shake coins out of their pockets.

As the old couple picks up the loose change under the sofa cushions, a voice booming with dread asks, “How will you finance *your* long-term retirement?”

“What are we going to live on in our old age?” Carol asked.

“Plan A!” I announced proudly.

“What’s that?”

“Rich beyond our wildest dreams!”

She, of course, wanted to know the details of Plan A, and whether it involved bouncing our neighbors on the sofa or poking our fingers in coin-return slots of vending machines.