

Planet Christ-mess

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"Greatness lives in one who triumphs equally over defeat and victory." ~ John Steinbeck



Have a Hairy, Merry Xmas

My darling wife Melinda and I had planned to Amtrack up to Fox Island, Washington, to spend a safe and insane Christmas with our dearest friend, Phil Austin's antic widow, Oona, her pack of silly dogs and local friends, but thanks to the panic of the pandemic, it was not to be.

Instead, we will be celebrating the day with a visit from Melinda's darling "baby" sister, Bonnie, who'll drive up from Imperial Beach – where we already spent a delicious Thanksgiving together – for another happy family festival.

"Blessed be the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love."
~ Hamilton Wright Mable



A present present

A MAN ASKS HIS WIFE OF 40 years what she wants for this year's Christmas celebration together. "Would you like a new mink coat?" he asks. "Not really," she responds. "I love my fake furs." "Well how about a new Mercedes sportscar?" She responds, "No thanks, I have my Hybrid." "OK, dearest," he offers, slightly exasperated. "Would some beautiful new jewelry do the trick?" "Not really," she shrugs, "It's ostentatious while so many are in need." "Well then, my love," he continues, "what about a new ultra-private vacation home in Aruba?" She again rejects his offer with, "No, thanks. I'd miss my charity work."

"Well, for Heaven's sake," he persists, "What WOULD you like?"

"I want a divorce," she declares. And after a moment her husband says, "Sorry, darling, but I wasn't planning on spending that much on you."

"I make the most of all that comes and the least of all that goes."

~ Poet Sara Teasdale

A real Christmas tweet

T HE TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY SONG, "Partridge in a Pear Tree," was written in the 1780s under the reign of **George III**, when birds were extremely scarce in England due to over-hunting, so all 12 gifts were actually birds in the original published song.

A Partridge in a Pear Tree - Both things uncommon in the country, partridges having gone extinct in the region due to hunting in 1763, when the last of its kind was shot down by The Duke of Ellingsby and left for his dogs. And pear trees cannot grow in the region at all.

Two Turtle Doves - The rarest known dove, now completely extinct as it was hunted for its precious shell, which was often used to make frames for glasses.

Three French Hens - The French Hen was not technically a hen, but a species of vulture that resembled a chicken. This species was farmed, not hunted, but was exceedingly scarce as the breed was closely controlled by the French family who would go on to introduce "Bird Mustard," meant specifically for the breed, and French's



Mustard is still made today.

Four Calling Birds - refers to a Aves Cornelius, or the Calling Cornish Grouse as it's known today. It exists now only in zoos. The bird is notable for its male having a corkscrew-shaped 14-inch penis which was dried and turned to powder for use as an aphrodisiac.

Five Golden Rings - are Gold Ringed Pheasants, the last known specimen being eaten by **Gerald Geraldson Esq.** who consumed the bird with a dollop of French's Bird Mustard.

Six Geese-a-Laying - does not refer to Geese laying eggs but to **Alayin Geese**, a breed of golden geese, likely the inspiration for the goose that lays a golden egg, but already extinct when the song was written.

Seven Swans a-Swimming - Swans are common today but only because of an intensive breeding program. This is why the "duck" in "The Ugly Duckling" is so remarkable, not for its beauty but for its rarity.

Eight Maids-a-Milking - The now extinct Maidenhair was the only known bird to have live birth and nurse its young with its milk. And "Maiden's Milk" was used to make the original eggnog, a royal delicacy reserved only for the children of the king and queen and only served on Christmas.

Nine Ladies Dancing - Seems an odd gift to give a lover, unless you know that the Dancing Lady Eagle was the only eagle to live in England at the time, named for its habit of shaking violently to rid itself of Eagle Ticks, in what resembled a frenzied dance. It lives only in captivity now, but as the tick has gone extinct, it no longer dances.

Ten Lordes-a-Leaping - The Lorde Heron still exists today, though it is no longer called the "Leaping Lorde" as it was in the time of the song.

Eleven Pipers Piping - The Piper Finch is still rare though it's sold today at some pet shops and bird markets. Its voice was once said to be the most beautiful sound in the world. Considered a nuisance by most it is however memorialized by adorning the tip of the Washington Monument, since **George Washington** raised them. And furthermore, the British Piper Tax was one of the reasons the colonies split off to form the modern country of New England.

■ CONTINUED

Twelve Drummers Drumming - refers to the Drumming Magpie, immortalized by **Rossini** in his opera *La Gazza Tamburo*. The rarest bird in England by far, only three were known to exist at the time of the song's writing. This would make 12 of them an exceptional rarity and nearly impossible to crown the parade of gift birds. The Drumming Magpie is named for its habit of tapping on trees to drive out maggots and grubs for it to eat.

So there you have it - the song is a love song about finding the rarest birds in England for the one you love. This stands in stark contrast to "The Eight Days of Hanukkah," in which the gifts include horseradish, cement, hair dye, a basketball, and lint.

"One cannot and must not try to erase the past merely because it does not fit the present." ~ **Golda Meir**

Fair trade

PLANEER ROGER STEFFENS WRITES: "I HEAR Trump is going to return to reality TV to star in the next season of *The Biggest Loser*. His inaction on the virus has led to an inability to see time the way we used to.

"For example: the OED's recent inclusion of Bluesday in their *Words of the Year* suggests other choices for the names of our present 'Weak Days' such as: **Oneday, Bluesday, Blendsday, Blursday, FriedDay, ScatteredDay and Someday.**"

"Spellcheck can be our worst enema." ~ **Richard Fish**

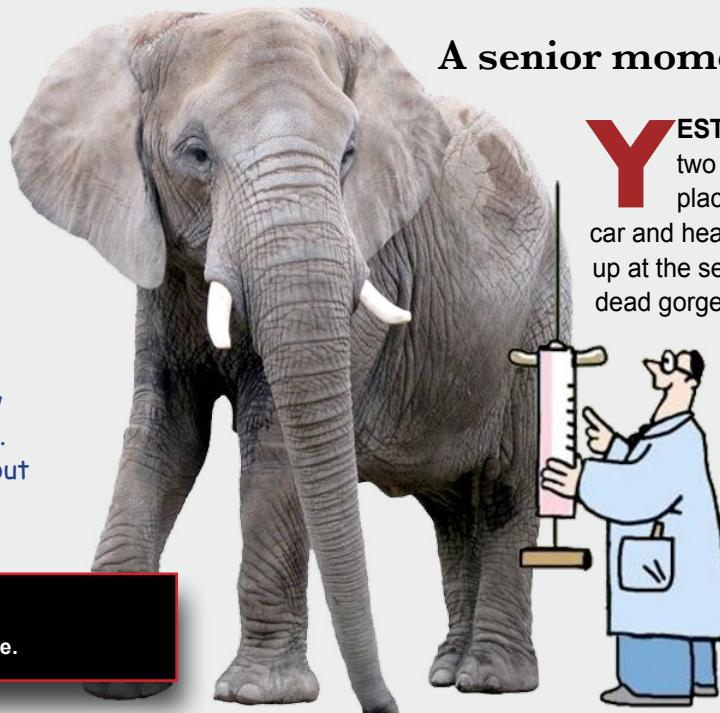
Stick it to 'em

1. The vaccine should be tested on **Republican politicians first.**
2. If they survive, **the vaccine is safe.**
3. If they don't, **the country is safe.**

"It's wanting to know that makes us matter. Otherwise, we're going out the way we came in." ~ **Tom Stoppard**

NEEDLING

A win-win for science.



The Tower of Babbling



MATHIAS AND ME

Anna and I in Noel Coward's 'Peace in Our Time' at Antaeus Theatre Company in 2011

GOT A CALL FROM MY friend **Bill Kanengiser** of the Grammy-winning **Los Angeles Guitar Quartet**, with whom I toured in a wonderful **Don Quixote** piece a few years back, wondering if I could recommend a singer-actress who might speak a little Yiddish. **Melinda** and I put our heads together and after applying ointment to the bumps, came up with our dear friend and fellow

Antaeus member **Anna Mathias**.

Now you can see her shine in a unique music video – a collaboration by the brilliant Brazilian musician **Clarice Assad** and her amazing father, **Sergio**, who wrote this antic composition called

The Tower of Babbling in Spanish, Gypsy jazz, Klezmer, and Brazilian styles with nonsense lyrics in Yiddish, Spanish, French and Portuguese supplied by Bill.

THROUGHOUT THE 'PLANET,' CLICKING **DARK RED TYPE** OPENS A RELATED INTERNET LINK.

Along with Anna and Clarice, who did the video design and editing, the beautiful **Lara Bello** and **Badi Assad** sing along. Oy Vey! **SEE FOR YOURSELF**

"The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat." ~ **Lily Tomlin**

A senior moment

YESTERDAY MORNING, I BOUGHT two six packs of beer on sale. I placed them on the front seat of the car and headed back home, but I had to fill up at the service station where a drop-dead gorgeous blonde in tight shorts and a lowcut top was pumping her car next to mine.

Once finished, she came up to my passenger window and said in an inviting voice, "I am a big believer in barter, mister. Would you be interested in trading sex for beer?"

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I thought for a few seconds and asked, "What kind of beer you got?"

"There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm." ~ Willa Cather

Phunny Phacts

CHISTMAS—WHAT OTHER TIME OF THE YEAR do you sit in front of a dead tree and eat candy out of your socks? If a word is misspelled in the dictionary, how would we ever know? Why do we say something is out of whack? What is a whack? Why does "slow down" and "slow up" mean the same thing? Why does "fat chance" and "slim chance" mean the same thing? Why do "tug" boats push their barges? Why do we put suits in garment bags and garments in a suitcase? How come abbreviated is such a long word? Why is "phonics" not spelled the way it sounds?

Why do we sing "Take me out to the ball game" when we are already there? Why are they called "stands" when they are made for sitting? Why is it called "after dark" when it really is "after light"? Doesn't "expecting the unexpected" make the unexpected expected? Why is the third hand on the watch called the second hand?

If you are cross-eyed and have dyslexia, can you read all right? Why are a "wise man" and a "wiseguy" opposites? Why do "overlook" and "oversee" mean opposite things? Why is bra singular and panties plural? Why do you press harder on the buttons of a remote control when you know the batteries are dead? Why do we wash bath towels? Aren't we clean when we use them?

Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle? Why do they call it a TV set when you only have one? Why do we drive on a parkway and park on a driveway? If love is blind, why is lingerie so popular? If all the world is a stage, where is the audience sitting?

"Great minds discuss ideas, mediocre minds discuss events, small minds discuss personalities."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

A scary story

ASENIOR WOMAN WAS INTERVIEWED BY A young doctor, and after a few minutes, she ran down the hall screaming bloody murder! An older doctor stopped her and asked what the problem was and led her to calm down in another room.

The senior doctor then marched back to the intern and demanded, "What's the matter with you? Mrs. Terry is 63 years old! She has four grown children and seven grandchildren – and you just told her she was pregnant?"

The new doctor nodded as he continued to write on his clipboard and then said: "Cured her hiccups though, didn't it?"

"Memory is a complicated thing; a relative to truth, but not its twin."
~ Novelist Barbara Kingsolver

Here's my Fortune Cookie

LET'S END THE YEAR WITH A REVIEW OF *Where's my Fortune Cookie?* by our good friend and travelling companion, author **Lance Rucker**, in Vancouver:

"I have never before reviewed a book with an infinite number of pages. Every time I pick up *Where's My Fortune Cookie?* to look up a passage to refresh my memory about details or just to read it to someone, I discover a whole new section of memories of bizarre and intriguing history which I had never seen before. Like Chapter 13 – where did that come from? I couldn't



DECLARING CHAPTER 13
The photo that opens 'Where's My Fortune Cookie's' 13th chapter is of Phil, Tuesday Weld and Jack Nicholson in 'A Safe Place'

have missed it before! And

I couldn't have forgotten it. I'd read this extraordinary autobiography cover-to-cover right after I received my copy – or so I thought... It's like a three-sided LP vinyl by **Cheech and Chong** which I owned for nearly a year before the needle set down in the parallel grooves and I discovered Side Three.

"Prior to reading *Where's My Fortune Cookie?* I thought I had lived the world's most fascinating life, peopled by

■ **CONTINUED**

LENNIE AND LANDER

The late David Lander, below right with Michael McKean (circa 2004) and in their iconic roles of Lenny and Squiggy in 'Laverne & Shirley' (1976-83)



an eclectic posse of famous and fascinating characters (including **Phil** and **Melinda**). And now I have come to realize that I have led only ONE of the world's most fascinating lives. Hmm... Good to know.

"What we have here is a phantastic photo album narrated by a richly talented comedy actor depicting a zootropic series of glimpses through an Epic Era of Entertainment Evolution over the past 60 years, with a thoroughly amazing recall of details of the people and events which have made up the warp and woof of the fabric of those many crazy decades. Good work, Phil! Good work, Brad!"

And good work, Lance! Available at blurb and **AMAZON.COM**

*"It is better to fail in originality
than to succeed in imitation."*

~ Herman Melville

Hello, Squiggy

DAVID L. LANDER, THE COMIC ACTOR WHO for eight seasons made entrance laughter inevitable on the ABC series "Laverne & Shirley," died in LA at 73, after a 37-year struggle with multiple sclerosis.

He and his comedy partner, **Michael McKean**, invented Lenny and Squiggy in college and introduced the characters with the Credibility Gap, a topical comedy troupe that also included **Harry Shearer**, all of whom we got to know when we did radio shows back-to-back on KRLA.

David publicly revealed his medical condition in 1999 and then published a memoir, *Fall Down, Laughing: How Squiggy Caught MS and Didn't Tell Nobody*, and with the support of his loving wife, **Kathy Fields**, and their daughter, **Natalie**, he became a good-will ambassador for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

David adored movies, and the last time I was with him at a Writers Guild screening, I helped Kathy get him into their car, when suddenly his pants fell down! We all had a good laugh, and it's a fitting memory of a great friend who was deeply funny 'til the end.

"Don't wait. The timing may never be right."
~ Napoleon Hill

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Breaking good

CHUCK YEAGER, THE HISTORIC TEST PILOT portrayed in the movie *The Right Stuff*, broke the light barrier at the ripe old age of 97. His historic flight in the Bell X-1 rocket plane, nicknamed *The Glamorous Glennis* after his late wife, launched the Space Age, when he travelled at 700 miles per hour.

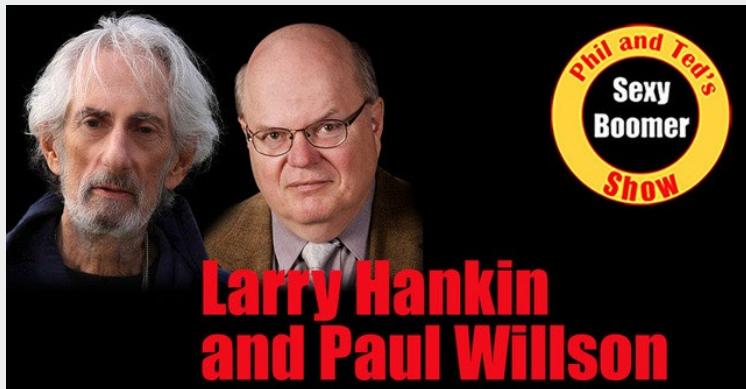


With his 20/10 vision in both eyes, he could see to infinity (and beyond), and he quickly became an ace fighter pilot in WW2. "No risk is too great to prevent the necessary job from getting done," believed Yeager (pictured with *Glenis*); and as he said in *Yeager: An Autobiography*, "Living to a ripe old age is not an end in itself. The trick is to enjoy the years remaining." I think he did.

"Never let your memories be greater than your dreams."
~ Douglas Ivester

Planeteers

Kenneth Wilhite, Jr., Allison Barenbrug, Melinda Peterson, Kristin Campbell, Gregg Oppenheimer, Jamie Alcroft, Roger Steffens, Richard Fish, Baba Mail and Ted Bonnitt of *Phil & Ted's Sexy Boomer Show*, recently posting a **REVEALING CHAT** with **Larry Hankin** of "Seinfeld" and "Breaking Bad" and **Paul Willson** of "Cheers" and "The Larry Sanders Show."



"You can't teach a dogma, new tricks." ~ Dorothy Parker

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And Happy Birthdays to the ever-youthful **Bianca Rucker** and **Melanie Chartoff**!

Stay safe, dear friends, and let's pray 4 a better 2021~ *Phil & Melinda*

"Ignorance is bliss. I speak from experience."
~ Hank Yarbro

Planet Jeers

FEET

DENSMORE

JAG

AMISH

NAME IT

DEW TELL

TWAIN

JOHN

UFOS

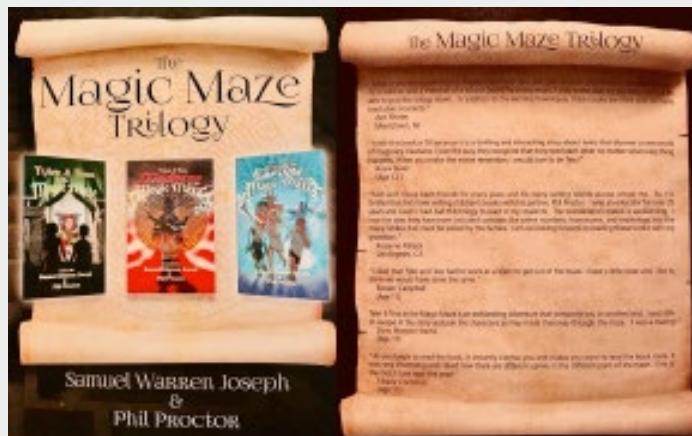
DOPES

DOPE HUMOR

JESUS

Stuff that sock

'M EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE that **Samuel Joseph** and I have finally published our challenging educational comic adventure: ***The Magic Maze Trilogy***: *Tyler and Tess in the Magic Maze*, *Madness in the Magic Maze* and *Escape from the Magic Maze*, describing the adventures of 11-year old fraternal twins, Tyler and Tess Porter, who accidentally get trapped in an Alice in Wonderland/Wizard of Oz world, where in order to return



home, they must get through 12 separate parts of the maze – each its own crazy world with bizarre rules, riddles and puzzles that they must solve using their wits, knowledge and athletic prowess.

Geared to appeal to children from 7 to 13 and older fantasy fans as well, you can purchase the books separately or all at once just in time for Christmas at WWW.MAGICMAZE.COM

"Literature is the lie that tells the truth."
~ Poet Dorothy Allison