

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Devil's Workshop?...

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Every now and again, someone comes up with suggestions for addition to the list of what to do when there's nothing to do.

As often as not, such "yawn fodder" winds up to fill holes--gaping or otherwise--just before newspapers go to press.

I have another thought concerning an item that should be forever deleted from the list--the mistitled annual "All-Star" basketball game foisted on us by the National Basketball Association and its TV cohorts. Any other suggestion on the "what-to-do-list" is superior to this debacle which is no better than watching paint dry....

The "event" held a few nights ago featured true all-stars, but they might as well have been playing "H-O-R-S-E." In the Eastern All-Stars' "win" over the West, the score was 211-186. Obviously whatever semblance of defense brought to the game was checked at the door.

Should the wretched excuse for a "game" continue, it should be more accurately named. How about a feel-good scrimmage featuring the Washington Generals vs. the Washington Generals? (With apologies to the Harlem Globetrotters who invariably rack up "wins" over the Generals.)

If all-stars of the major professional sports ever have a get-together, the NBA elite should be banned. Let them have their own party at a comedy club....

As youth, we were specialists in wasting time, but we could blame it on the young.

With much of my childhood in the 1950s, I recall two great time-wasters.

When soft-serve ice cream came to our town, one of our leading restaurants sold the cones at a "walk-up window." (This was several years before drive-in food joints appeared.) It was fun to watch the server's artistry in turning out cones with curls on top.) Our parents usually sprung for nickel cones which we licked slowly, wishing for the much bigger 10-cent cones....

But, wait! There was more.

The restaurant also had an electric bug-zapper that produced sizzling sounds when bugs met their electronic end.

Sometimes we counted how many “zaps” we heard between cone-licks. Talk about minutiae....

That’s not all, either.

Acceptable television reception was late getting to our town, what with the nearest station about 75 miles away. Before there were many TV sets in homes, they were often displayed in a downtown shop window. On many summer evenings, my dad would drive us slowly past the store, all of us hoping there’d be discernible TV pictures emerging from the snowy screen. When there was, we’d stop, pressing noses against the window glass to get as close to the TV set as possible.

I suppose, then, that licking ice cream cones while hearing bugs get zapped and watching snowy TV pictures in a show window might be akin to time wasted while watching the NBA circus. But remember, we were kids....

My ancient Uncle Mort claims he gave up on the game decades ago. He’s not surprised that it continues its slide into meaninglessness. But, he admits to finding humor in circumventing the conventional, which is only a skosh different than purposely wasting time.

Specifically, he enlivens routine visits to doctors’ offices by “poking fun” when he fills out the same papers completed during his previous visits. Office attendants “see him coming,” knowing they’ll have to ask him to return to their desk to correct his fake answers.

In the “answer blank” about contact in case of an emergency, he writes “call ambulance.” And on the “age blank,” he answers “digital.”....

A patriot to the core, he also enlivens “shopping humdrum” by checking labels of merchandise, always delighted when he finds “made in America” tags. Too often, he whines, “made in Taiwan” or “made in China” dominate.

He stopped abruptly recently, noticing bold print on a box encasing a TV set. It read, “Built in antenna.”

“Now that’s a place I’ve never heard of,” he told the sales guy, “Where is Antenna?” Mort was satisfied with the answer that Antenna is a small community a few miles from Athens....

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