

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Roofers at the Ready....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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They're as predictable as frantic taxpayers working until the hours are few on April 14 to meet income tax filing deadlines the following midnight. A nomadic bunch, they show up following hailstorms, cell phones in hand with promises to examine roofs. Yep, an unexpected call from an unknown number.

"We just happen to be in *the* neighborhood, and wonder if you'd like a free assessment," they say. Notice that they don't say *your* neighborhood; truth to tell, they may be in neighborhoods several time zones away, implying that they're about to ring your doorbell.

I'm just urging caution. TV ads blare of lawyers whose services are free if cases are not won, and government representatives who are "here to help us." Some gift-bearers turn out to be of Greek origin....

Hailstones and dogs "woofing" bring roofs to mind, and a favorite story my Uncle Mort has repeated so many times that it has grown whiskers.

It's about a 1950s neighbor who tried fruitlessly to run his household, his hand clutching his pocketbook. He was said to be so frugal, he'd climb over gates to save the hinges.

Typically, he could put aside pleas from his wife and his children, but when they banded against him, he usually gave in, audibly groaning upon finally reaching for his wallet....

Before television came along, there was the push to get a battery-powered radio. "We ain't doin' it," he'd fume, "It would just lead to something else."

He'd give it his best shot, but soon the family was enjoying its very own radio.

Then, they came out with electrically-powered radios that had pull-out record players. Each time, the "head of the house" would trot out the same expression about purchases "leading to something else."....

Mama and the kids, all on bended knees, later begged fervently to purchase a television set. "It could be a Christmas gift for all of us," they whined.

Days became weeks, and the old guy--in a weaker moment--agreed to visit the store to get a first-hand look at TV sets.

"We're not buying one, though," he assured. "It would just lead to something else."....

The salesman, warning that Christmas shoppers were depleting their TV inventory, reinforced what appeared to be the winning team--Mama and the kids.

"I'm thinking about buying it, since it will be a gift for all of us," the prospective purchaser finally said, his resistance as depleted as the current stock of TV sets. "But I know it'll just lead to something else."

As they loaded the bulky 17-inch TV, the salesman added, "Of course, you'll need a TV antenna."....

Startled, the reluctant buyer responded, "Need a what?"

Explaining that TV reception in fringe areas required tall antennas, the salesman recommended a 20-foot antenna for placement on the peak of the roof.

"I knew it, I just knew it," the old man whimpered. "Now we've got to get us a roof."....

Finally, though, the TV brought considerable enjoyment, particularly when weather conditions were right for the reception of both pictures and sound. Often as not, only the sound came through, so at such times, it was no better than radio.

The late Bob Murphey, who spoke “perfect East Texas and fair English,” was a world-class storyteller, often speaking to the same audiences repeatedly.

And they always urged him to tell about his neighbor buying his family’s first TV set....

Jerry Clower, late Mississippi comedian, was on par with Murphey in yarn-spinning. He, too, was asked to relate favorite tales, even if audience members knew them by heart. One concerned his first visit to a “kaffay.” (Even then, most patrons called them “restaurants.”)

While paying his tab, Jerry extracted a tooth pick from a small glass container, carefully attending to both ‘uppers and lowers’ while the cashier dispensed his change.

Placing the toothpick back in the holder, Jerry said, “I’ll bet you thought I was going to steal that toothpick, didn’t you?”....

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