

The *Bar Fly* Hummingbird

Every year, with activity and suspense, we anticipate the arrival of hummingbirds. In preparation, we clean the fragile, bright-red feeders, sterilize a batch of sugar water, and strategically place the newly-filled feeders where we believe they will be most visible - and nearest to our eating and sitting vantage points.

The arrival date of our first client is recorded. We subsequently strain to catch brief glimpses of its ephemeral visits. For a month or so, we rarely see more than one hummingbird at a time.

This year, something different happened. One particular hummer alit on our shaded backyard feeder and began to rest for progressively longer periods. Over the next week, it began to rest on the feeder for up to a half-hour; then, for an hour. At this writing, we can view the bird, which we have now dubbed the '*Bar Fly*', almost at will. He - or , more provocatively, she - spends the bulk of its time lounging at the feeder. Have we spawned a drunk or attracted a hummer harlot in search of a client?- (Or, possibly, both?)

We are not complaining. We love our *Bar Fly Hummingbird* and hope its liver and sex drives hold out until it returns to chill out again next year.

Registering the 'Apostrophe'

I have decided to register - or trademark - the apostrophe ('). No, I don't want to compromise its proper use in surnames or other established literary conventions. Instead, I hope to discourage the erroneous usages of this simple, beloved, ancient, classical image. I would also like to encourage possible innovative and whimsical future applications for the apostrophe (as defined in Wikipedia*).

*An **apostrophe** (') is a [punctuation](#) and sometimes [diacritic](#) mark in [languages](#) written in the [Latin alphabet](#). In [English](#), it marks omissions, forms the possessive, and, in special cases, helps form plurals. The word comes from [Greek](#) [apóstrophos](#), through [Latin](#) and [French](#). Irish surnames often contain apostrophes, for instance the name O'Connor. This arose from a rendering of the Irish [Ó](#).

Since society seems so willing to abandon numerics, I am also anxious to rebel against its widespread failure to apply the apostrophe in *O'Clock*.

Alternately, I would be overjoyed to see Oprah take the playful step of reverting her name to *O'prah*? This would not only be capricious, but wonderful for the clan.

And as part of my own heritage, I am particularly concerned about escalating threats to the continued the use of the apostrophe. Often, today, we find language use abusers,

particularly among marketing agents, beleaguered editors and badly-educated members of the press who advocate for its retirement or elimination - generally, for their operational convenience and as a result of their literary inadequacies.

Tracking The Assault on the Use of Apostrophes

With the dawn of the new age of obsessive illiteracy, there are many who profess that they no longer believe in the existence of the *apostrohe*. Clumsily-written computer programs (crappy CPs for PCs) do not accommodate the *apostroe*, creating recognition problems for credit card companies, hotel managers and government agencies attempting to maintain files on suspected terrorists.

For example, without the *apostre*, data entry, at best, results in either the listing of Oconnor or O. Connor. These are not the same as the original. The confusion is occasionally overcome by a collection agency after an account has become delinquent -- and collectible.

Alternately, on late arrival, when your hotel is full and your room has been rented to another patron, your reservation was claimed to have been lost because of a '*computer error*'. Happily, therefore, no one is culpable -- except, perhaps, for the programmer, now working for FEMA, who was unable to handle the *apostr*.

What can *apost* users do to resist the tsunami of *apos* abuses? For one thing, we can discard all mailings and communications without an *apo*. They did not come from friends anyway.

And, if our bill payments are found to be delinquent, we can always blame our creditor's computers. It won't hurt the computer's feelings - unless, of course, they are Macs (Mc's?).

How to Prepare your Obituary?

One good rule is, '*keep it short*'. Since you have not been awarded Nobel prizes in science and medicine, no one is likely to read more than one-half page of your terminal memoir anyway. Of course, you could obfuscate like a modern denier and simply insist you actually received such prestigious awards. Why should anyone trouble themselves to fact-check your biography once you're dead? Moreover, true to form, the most credulous elements in your family circle will elaborate your assertions.

A most important element of any obituary is the mention of the names of all the family members, living and dead - all the way back to the Napoleonic wars. (For those whom you actually knew, make an effort to spell their names correctly. This family cadre will likely be your core readers. Refer to them as '*loving*', '*devoted*', '*caring*', ... They will like that.)

Treat your readers to the agreeable fable that you died, *'peacefully', 'happily', and 'surrounded by family'*. Cynics will surmise that you were really surrounded by empty bottles of gin and vodka when your body was discovered two days after your neighbor complained of strange odors. However, who will contradict a rose-colored account? In America, we are faulted if we speak ill of the dead.

If you want to curry community favor, list all local schools whose football teams you have heard of and urge your mourners to contribute to their sports scholarship programs. Finally, attach an antique photo of a ten-year old child embracing its mother. This flourish will ensure that your obituary melts the heart of even the most casual scanner.

Minus One Percent per Year - The Kinetics of Global Annihilation

Ever since the onset of COVID, every evening newscast brings an increasingly more frightening array of dreadful news - of disease, death, war, fire, flood, tornadoes, terrorism, school shootings, record temperatures, crop-destroying drought, human migrations, corrupt politicians, ...

However, for a certain percentage of the population, these terrifying reports are offset by unending reports of financial gains, including new records for the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 Stock Average Index, the Nasdaq composite, and the valuation of the ephemeral Bitcoin.

Perhaps the global reach of world news is simply broadening to encompass hitherto undiscovered sources of tragedy. Or, perhaps, the photogenic bevy of beauties and body-builders that read the teleprompter to us are getting better at scare-speak.)

Increasingly, the spastic cellphone video often accompanying today's most deadly and fearsome news is described as *'hard to watch'*. Even so, the images we are warned about are replayed repeatedly, throughout the newscast. It's takes work not to see them.

Perhaps because of the emphasis on the most immediate (breaking) news, our longer vision of our unfolding future is barely discernible. It lacks shape or urgency. It can wait until we have mourned the dead and replaced our mattress and dishwasher.

Most are aware that the fundamental underpinnings that support human life on earth are, incrementally and seemingly imperceptibly, declining year by year.

Even so, in Columbia, Missouri, presumably an educated and enlightened community, we are upgrading our airport facilities and extending its runways.

Pukey

Not long ago, I decided to search for my undiscovered family members. Perhaps, I thought, I will find that I am related to other illustrious thinkers, writers, scholars, artists, lovers, and illustrious heroes.

Nor surprisingly, I found promises of a great deal of help and guidance (sometimes, free) on-line. Sites in Utah or hosted by the Mormon Church were prominent. Mormon families are really into this kind of activity since they subscribe to a really hard-core concept of soul recycling.

In their telling, their deceased relatives can be baptized by proxy in the temple. Then, their souls can be saved (posthumously) and returned to save the eternal family unit. While I thought that was nice motivation for discovering your kin, I was more interested in uncovering fame and honor to undergird my bragging rights. So, I moved on.

In addition to the trove that the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* provided, I found *FindMyPast*, *23andMe*, *WeRelate*, *AfriGeneas*, *Mocavo*, and *MyHeritage*. The help available was overwhelming and often came at a cost.

When the smoke cleared, I had unearthed just one persistent personage, an immigrant from Vilnius, Lithuania who had arrived in Boston, Massachusetts in 1920. I found his name, Dominykas Vytautas, despite my heritage, unpronounceable.

His arrival in America might have been the last mention of him in my searches had he not earned an enviable arrest record for his notorious efforts to smuggle alcoholic beverages into Boston during America's Prohibition years.

Dominykas' smuggling problems were overt and numerous. He not only lacked proficiency at sailing and navigating (the boat he managed to resuscitate from the discard of Boston harbor was old, undersized, and often left him in need of being rescued), he also could not recruit a credible source of drinkable booze. These initial deficiencies were critical enough when he began his nautical import business, but they worsened when he decided to abandon the sea and undertook to brew his own beverages ashore.

In the heart of the Prohibition era, thirsty clients, particularly impecunious ones, were not fussy about the quality of the intoxicants they imbibed. Even so, the associated hangovers and gastrointestinal illnesses that accompanied consumption of Dominykas' fluids ultimately earned him the sobriquet, *Pukey*.

The pithy epithet, *Pukey*, quickly resonated - particularly among his most consummate drinking constituency. It was bad - indeed, fatal - for his business.

Still, *Pukey*, as a notable alternative to the *Real McCoy*, had become somewhat of a regional legend.