You Can't Park Your Elephant on Main Street, You Know

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"LAW: A person may not cross state lines with a duck atop his head. (Location: United States, Minnesota)"

Cover Page Footnote

This prose is available in The Angle: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol2006/iss2/13
MICHAEL STECK

YOU CAN’T PARK YOUR ELEPHANT ON MAIN STREET, YOU KNOW

LAW: A person may not cross state lines with a duck atop his head. (Location: United States, Minnesota)

In high school I was very experimental with my hair. I just felt like it needed to be a different color every week. I’m not exactly sure why but for some reason I thought this was a good idea. I wanted to look different from the person I was and I hated blond hair. In fact, I actually came to loathe the dirty blond creature that perched on top of my head. I guess I felt that my blond hair made me stand out too much. I wanted to be like the guys I saw on television who all were abnormally good-looking and they all had dark hair. Why couldn’t I be like everyone else?

Of course if my goal was to blend in like everyone else, the fact seemed to elude me that no one else’s hair color changed every week, although the interesting dichotomy was in some ways I wanted to stand out. I wanted people to take notice of me because I was different, yet part of me just wanted to fit in. My mind was like a big tub of yogurt with the fruit on the bottom that you could swirl around. One part wanted just the plain vanilla and the other wanted that fruit all swirled around for everyone to taste. I guess one way to accomplish both was to change my hair. One week my hair was the color of a copper kettle. The next it would be the color of fudge. Another time it was the color of rusted metal and like the Sonny and Cher song says, “the beat goes on,” and on, and on.

I was also completely influenced by the media. I lived for MTV. I dreamt of being a rock star but my singing sounded like a dying cow, so it was never going to happen. I worshipped all of the Pop/Rock Gods and none of them more than Madonna. From floor to ceiling my bedroom was slathered in pictures of Madonna in every incarnation. Every time she changed her look I would get that itch that I couldn’t scratch and I’d want to change my hair again too. I wanted to be like Madonna and all the other gods with the cool hair.

One adventurous time I was feeling a little on the edge, thinking I was Cyndi Lauper or something, and I thought coloring my hair jet black and leaving the front light blond would look extra cool. And with that thought I rushed to CVS to buy myself some magic-marker-black hair color. I rushed home barely able to contain the excitement for my latest hair “don’t.”

I watched the seconds tick away on my aqua Swatch Watch, waiting for the 45 minutes the directions said it took. As I waited, the dark slop on top of my head grew darker and darker. It looked like I poured a cup of tar on my head. I briefly thought that this may not have been the best choice for me. Yet, after I rinsed all the muck out of my hair I actually thought I was looking pretty fucking cool.

On a trip to the optometrist’s office shortly after my new hair session-de-jour, I was sitting in a chair waiting for them to bring me my new contact lenses to try on. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of something in the mirror and I nearly leapt out of my chair because I actually thought, for a split second, that a skunk had somehow landed on my head. I looked like I had Pepé Le Pew sitting where my hair should be. I could barely muffle my screech as I quickly made a mad dash out of the office and straight to the drug store.

As quick as I could I ran home with my hair color removal kit. I just prayed it would work and could salvage this cartoon skunk on my head. I read the instructions and I thought in my brilliant reasoning that I would not leave it on as long as it said, so I could just lighten the color a bit. I applied. I waited. I rinsed. I looked in the mirror and this time the cry came out like the wail of a banshee. Instead of my friend Pepé, I now seemed to have something that resembled a dead duck on my head. I went from skunk to mallard in just 15 minutes. It was every which color but right.

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I called to my mother who quickly ran to the bathroom not sure what the hell I had done this time. When she first saw me she literally jumped back a few feet and then quickly tried to maintain her “Mom” composure.

“It doesn’t look that bad,” she said.

“Mom, it looks like a dead duck on my head.”

“Well, yes,” she said, with a smile that looked like someone was stepping on her toes while she was doing it. “You’re kind of right.”

“Thanks Mom. You weren’t supposed to agree.”

“I know, let me go make an appointment at my salon.”

After going to the salon and sitting in a chair for almost four hours and embarrassed beyond belief, my hair was fixed. My desire to ever color my hair again myself was also fixed, at least for that week.

LAW: Persons classified as "ugly" may not walk down any street. (Location: United States, California, San Francisco)

I remember one time being in Marketplace Mall in Henrietta, New York. It was the place my friends and I would always go to hang out, even if we had no money to buy anything. I remember skipping school one time and driving up to the big city. It was a big deal because we were from Canandaigua, NY, and the name of the town was bigger than the town. There wasn’t much to do in the upright little village so we’d always want to venture out into the great beyond, and back then that would be the mall.

We were sitting in the food court, eating some processed food (if you could even classify that fast food gunk as food) and in through the glass doors walked something and I stressed the thing at the end of that word. I think I had to close my eyes and rub them to make sure I hadn’t gotten something on my contact lenses. All I could think when she or it walked through those doors was that it was this character, Augra, from the movie “The Dark Crystal.” The red, tattered, moth-eaten dress she was wearing looked identical to the one the character wore. She had this hair that was piled so high that it doubled her height. It was so matted and frizzy that it no longer looked like hair. Maybe it was just a 300-year-old wig. The color was this dead gray color like the color of a tombstone but it had chunks of red strands of straw strewn throughout.

I thought about this creature as she proudly walked through the mall past all the stores, the snickers and the people blatantly pointing at her. Though I couldn’t really see her face because it was covered by the monster she let live on top of her head, I caught a glimmer of something that look like her teeth in the shape of a smile. I wondered how she could march through that place without caring what people thought. I thought about myself as I walked down the halls of Canandaigua Academy and how I was always afraid that people were staring at me, giving me the same jabs and jeers. I always felt like someone had took my mind and shoved it into this strange body that never seemed to move the way I wanted it to. And yet this creature strutted through the mall as proud as a peacock displaying its grand feathers.

I wondered what mirror she was looking in when she got ready to go out on the prowl. Was it some crazy funhouse mirror that showed you in some distorted view or did she have a mirror like Malificent had in Snow White that instead of telling her the truth, lied to her and told her she was the fairest in the land? All I knew was that I wanted that mirror. I wanted my mirror to tell me I looked good. I wanted my mirror to stop crying out that I was not even close to the fairest of them all.

Augra continued her stroll down the mall, pushing her own personal cart, filled with bags of mysterious contents that I was probably better off not knowing what was inside, further into the heart of the mall. I thought if she could walk with her head held up high, especially holding what could have been her house on her head, then there was no reason for me to even think there was anything wrong with me. I realized I didn’t need a lying mirror, I just needed to look past what I thought I saw. I also didn’t want some mirror lying to me and letting me go out.
in public looking like I was rode hard and put away wet.

LAW: You're not allowed to park your elephant on Main Street. (Location: United States, Minnesota, Virginia)

I remember my second grade teacher Miss Ismann. Her high pitched voice still rings in my ears. I can't recall the exact words but she always reminded my of Edith Bunker from “All in the Family.” Well, more like what Edith’s mother would be like. Sometimes her perfectly coiffed do would be slightly crooked, much to our glee. I used to love watching “The Carol Burnett Show” and I always thought Miss Ismann’s wig looked like Carol’s character Eunice on the show, sort of like a brown bob with a poodle puff in the front and along the bottom edges. In her dark monotone colors, her favorite was gray, she looked like an baby elephant with a winter hat on. I used to imagine someone walking her down Main Street for our annual Christmas Day parade or maybe, more appropriately, St. Patrick’s Day, since I think she liked to sneak a nip of the bottle now and again.

When we would take tests in class, we would have to all line up in a single file line at her desk and wait for our papers to be graded. I’m not exactly sure why Miss Ismann was the way she was. I don’t know if it was that she had a bottle of gin tucked away in her large purse she always carried or if she was just old, but as she got further down the line, she would start to fall asleep while she was grading our papers.

“Miss Ismann, Miss Ismann,” someone would call out.

With a loud snort she’d raise her head and push back her wig that had fallen far over her forehead. The kids used to whisper about how she was completely bald underneath. They also used to talk about how one time a boy had brought a fishing pole to school, and how, during one of Miss Ismann’s naptimes, he had thrown the line over the large movable walls of our classroom that looked like big Legos. Supposedly the hook had landed right on top of her wig and pulled it right up off her bald head. I imagine if it did happen it probably took her a few minutes to wake up and even realize what had happened.

If you were one of the lucky ones, you got your paper graded while she was falling asleep, like I always seemed to. She would take her red pen and check the answers that were wrong and when she went to put your letter grade on it, that’s when it happened. Just as she finished writing my “A” her head fell lower as if her wig were made of lead. As her head fell down, her hand started to drift on the paper like a psychic doing automatic writing.

“Miss Ismann,” I said, gently taping her mushy shoulder.

“Ten divided by two, oh,” she mumbled as she kick-started back to life. “Good job, Billy, you got an A.”

“It’s Mikey.”

“What?”

“Never mind,” I said.

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