

HEADLINES I HAVE LOVED

MARY CHRISTIE CRAIG
Pineville, Louisiana

The headline writers for our local newspaper, the Town Talk, have to be closet punsters. There's no other explanation for the play-on-words banners which so frequently appear in boldface. Here are my favorites, most of which are self-explanatory:

FRIARS TUCKED INTO TODAY'S SOCIETY
FISH CLEANERS FOUL DOCKS
LOUISIANA'S OYSTER SEASON FLOUNDERING
LSU'S FULLER HAS BRUSHES WITH GREATNESS (football story)
SHUE GETS THE BOOT (NBA coach fired)
30 MARIJUANA PLANTS SEIZED IN JOINT EFFORT BY OFFICERS
'STAKEOUT' NAILS DOWN TOP SPOT (number one movie of the week)
ROBBER TAKES DOUGH FROM BREAD MAN (delivery man loses \$90)
BUCHANAN: HE'S A THORN IN THE SIDE OF BUSH
MISSED COFFEE BREAKS GROUNDS FOR REIMBURSEMENT
CZECH CASHED (Cash defeats Lendl)
NEAT GIFTS FOR SEWERS (presents for seamstresses)
FROM BAUD TO VERSE (computer users wax poetic)
WOK AROUND THE CLOCK: UTENSIL PANS OUT FOR KITCHEN WORK

One of my favorites is, I admit, disgraceful. It concerns an auto mishap involving the remains of an executed Angola prison inmate named Jimmie Glass: HEARSE IN ACCIDENT; GLASS BODY DELAYED.

From the Internet came some headlines I've put into two categories: Duh.. and Hunh?

IF STRIKE ISN'T SETTLED QUICKLY IT MAY LAST AWHILE
SMOKERS ARE PRODUCTIVE, BUT DEATH CUTS EFFICIENCY
COLD WAVE LINKED TO TEMPERATURES
BLIND WOMAN GETS NEW KIDNEY FROM DAD SHE HASN'T SEEN IN
YEARS
MAN IS FATALLY SLAIN

GRANDMOTHER OF EIGHT MAKES HOLE IN ONE
DEAF MUTE GETS NEW HEARING IN KILLING
STIFF OPPOSITION EXPECTED TO CASKETLESS FUNERAL PLAN
TWO CONVICTS EVADE NOOSE, JURY HUNG
IRAQI HEAD SEEKS ARMS
QUEEN MARY HAVING BOTTOM SCRAPED
MINERS REFUSE TO WORK AFTER DEATH
EYE DROPS OFF SHELF

TWO SISTERS REUNITE AFTER EIGHTEEN YEARS AT CHECKOUT COUNTER

My favorite headline of all came from the front page of the Town Talk: SUPER SALAD--TWO TRUCKS PRODUCE GIANT APPETIZER. Under the picture I read the line "Heads rolled Thursday morning as lettuce and other vegetables were scattered...as a result of a traffic accident involving two produce trucks..."

THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN

To aid in the compilation of the Oxford English Dictionary, Dr. James Murray in 1879 appealed for helpers to read early English texts and copy out word usages. Many signed up, the most unusual of whom was Dr. William Chester Minor, incarcerated at the time in the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum for shooting an Irishman to death on a London street in 1872. (Minor suffered from a delusion that all Irishmen were seeking revenge for his branding of an Irish deserter during the Civil War.) Using monies from his military pension, Minor was able to furnish his prison cell with some degree of comfort, including his personal library which he augmented by purchases from London book dealers. With the aid of this library, plus unlimited amounts of free time imposed by his imprisonment, Minor supplied Dr. Murray with scores of thousands of definitions during the next twenty years; he became, in fact, one of Murray's most prolific correspondents.

Minor's story is a fascinating one, well-researched and entertainingly narrated by Simon Winchester. (The book was on the NY Times best-seller list for many weeks after its publication by HarperCollins in 1998 (ISBN 0-06-017596-6).) For a fuller account of the making of the Oxford English Dictionary, this book should be read in conjunction with K.M. Elisabeth Murray's *Caught in the Web of Words* (Yale University Press, 1977).