

STICKING TO MY PUNS

Still More Wordplay in Everyday Situations

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From *The Wall Street Journal*, December 7, 2017:

“A Manhattan man who stole tens of thousands of dollars from women he met on the dating app Tinder was sentenced Wednesday to at least two years in prison. . . . ‘Through a series of elaborate scams, [he] exploited dates and acquaintances, swiping tens of thousands of dollars left and right as he emptied victims’ wallets and accounts,’ Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. said in a statement.”

The pun is clever, though some might question the propriety of a public official’s flippancy in such serious circumstances. Still, this confirms my long-held theory that wordplay can be effectively deployed in the most unlikely places.

It’s time for another roundup of puns drawn from my own experiences. Here’s the Official Originality Disclaimer: Though the following incidents and associated quips really happened, Internet searches revealed that I was anticipated in some cases. Acknowledgments, sort of, appear at the end of this article.

- As a favor, I agreed to pick up a snack for a friend at a gourmet fast-food emporium. En route, I sent him an e-mail message with a link to the menu. Subject line: “URL of Sandwich.”
- An out-of-town guest accompanied me to an appointment, which required us to traverse Central Park on foot in chilling weather. Unaccustomed to the distance, a trek I had made hundreds of times, he repeatedly asked a question familiar to numerous families on car trips: “Aren’t we there yet?” I riposted: “For us New Yorkers, this is a walk in the park!”
- Dining at a restaurant in Boston, a city where seafood is especially popular, my companion considered ordering the monkfish. She asked the waiter if it was acidic. I broke in: “No, it’s ascetic.”
- Visiting a hospitalized friend, I observed that he was doing his usual work, despite the difficult circumstances, and conducting business with a smartphone. I suggested that an iPad would make it all easier. He might, I wryly continued, request a prescription for the device. Then the doctor could say: “Take this tablet and call me in the morning.”

- On hearing an ancient joke: “The last time I encountered that chestnut, it was roasting on an open fire.”
- I sent someone a link to a podcast titled “You Are What You Eat,” adding a note that this hoary bromide is by now well past both its shelf life and sell-by date.
- At a shopping mall in Las Vegas, I was surprised that a major department store hadn’t yet opened for the day, even though it was almost noon. Peering through the door, I spotted a janitor cleaning the floor. “Hmmm,” I mused. “I thought this was the city that never sweeps.”
- An acquaintance told me that he had just taken one of those home DNA-kit tests. He expressed bafflement as to why the instructions called for such a copious amount of saliva—more, he thought, than could possibly be needed by the lab. “I can’t recall the reason,” I replied. “But it’s on the tip of my tongue.”
- Every hotel-room thermostat is a bit different, so it can sometimes take a while to master the controls and interpret the cryptic screen icons. But recently, one such gizmo in Washington, D.C., had me totally stumped. Repurposing an old joke in a newly appropriate context, I complained to the management: “I can’t figure this out, even though my I.Q. is above room temperature.”
- I’m sometimes asked for professional referrals. But I had to decline when queried about finding an electrician. “I have no connections.”
- During a meeting of a literary salon, focusing on an essay by Adam Smith, a participant announced that he couldn’t find the passage under discussion. I quipped: “Because it was written by the invisible hand.”

Cinema Corner: Based on a recommendation, I streamed *The Ninth Gate* (1999), a thriller wherein Johnny Depp plays an evil rare-book dealer. Several online reviewers questioned the unrealistic depictions of presumed experts handling priceless books—for example, while smoking. But no one mentioned Johnny’s stashing an expensive tome behind a hotel mini-bar. That would risk damage, I reasoned, from at least two sources: the heat exhaust and the possibility of leaks. This improbable scene suggested a slightly revised old saying: “It’s all water under the fridge!”

To conclude as we began, with a news item from 2017: Last April, a foundation created by the founders of Dannon yogurt donated one million dollars to Juilliard, the famous school that trains classical musicians. Apparently, no one at the time pointed out that this generous contribution lent new meaning to the word *culture*.

Credit Crunch: Title: Three people beat me to this one. Sandwich: Many links. Sweeps: Lots, though in other contexts. Saliva: I heard a variation years ago. Fridge: 68,000 results, though it’s tough to separate the literal uses from the puns.