

GAFFES WITH LAUGHS

The Return of Media Bloopers and Waggish Ripostes

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In light of the declining fortunes of newspapers, it might be surprising to learn that the “Dear Abby” syndicated advice column still exists, now written by the daughter of the original Abby. I found this Q&A in the July 11, 2018, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, while I was in that city for a conference.

Reader: “Keeping a [paper] journal has been shown to be of significant psychological benefit, but I do not want my private thoughts and concerns read by others after my death. . . .”

Advice: “Unless you have an executor you can trust to dispose of your journals when you are gone, my recommendation would be to keep your journals online, in the cloud, and able to be accessed only by you.”

My take: Also, your password should always be PASSWORD! On UExpress, a news aggregation site, this exchange generated 316 comments, many of which pointed out the cluelessness of the response. Calling Becky the Techie!

Here’s another roundup of amusing typos and oddities that I—and two contributors credited at end—spotted in the media, with puckish retorts appended. I haven’t done one of these compilations for *Word Ways* since the February 2015 issue. Why? It’s not that published mistakes have become less frequent, but rather that they’re not always funny. As a careless gardener might say, this collection of howlers makes up for tossed lime!

The Wall Street Journal, February 8, 2016, quoting a real-estate executive:

“Everyone is looking to create terraces and rooftop decks to attract tenants . . . because it’s a true differentiator.”

So much for that.

Associated Press, January 14, 2015:

“A middle school principal wants to stockpile cans of corn and peas in classrooms for students to hurl at possible intruders as a last defense.”

What happened to world peas?

Corrections, *The New York Times*, November 3, 2016:

“An entry to the ‘This and That’ feature on page 40 this weekend about the increasing popularity of regional Japanese fare in America misstates one way in which an udon-noodle dish is served at TsuruTonTan. The noodles are served over a bed of ice, not a bed of rice.”

Cold comfort.

The Wall Street Journal, July 2, 2018:

“Smithfield Foods Inc. lost a pivotal legal battle on Friday. . . . The lawsuit is the second in a series of complaints brought by 500 rural North Carolinians who live near Smithfield contractors storing manure in open pools. Representatives of Smithfield and the plaintiffs declined to comment, citing a gag order.”

It arrived not a moment too soon.

West Side Spirit, a Manhattan community weekly, April 18, 2017:

“A who kept his tools and other valuables inside a metal container in the basement of 242 West 104th St. told police that numerous tools . . . went missing sometime between February 27 and March 27.”

Only Dr. Seuss can solve this one.

Corrections, *The New York Times*, September 1, 2015:

“The obituary [of filmmaker Wes Craven] also misstated part of the name of the university from which Mr. Craven received a master’s degree in philosophy. It is Johns Hopkins, not John Hopkins.”

Nevertheless, a singular institution of learning.

New York Public Library program brochure, 2015:

“Dianne McIntyre is a groundbreaking artistic pioneer, with an impressive 40 decades of choreography for the dance and theatre stage, television, and film.”

Impressive—and exhausting.

The Wall Street Journal, June 17, 2015, quoting a consultant:

“There is a certain logic to the idea, but it seems there’s a lot that could wrong. . . .”

Evidently!

Finally, for us recreational linguists, misplaced modifiers are a risible staple. The author of a recent book that discusses former president Obama was quoted in *The New York Times* (September 22, 2018): “As the first African-American president and first lady, I am very wary of arguments that they should not do something everybody else was allowed to do.”

A similar sort of flub appeared in *USA Today* (April 1, 2014): “The balky back that’s forcing [Tiger Woods] to miss next week’s Masters is surely the death knell in his quest for Jack Nicklaus’ record of 18 major championships. He’s 38 going on 50, his body more broken down than a jalopy with a rebuilt knee, a patched together Achilles and now a back that bears the signature of a surgeon.”

The anthropomorphic jalopy aside, the writer’s prediction may be mistaken; Woods made a surprising championship comeback a few weeks ago, so he’s catching up with Nicklaus.

Credits: Thanks to Iris Bell, NYC, for the choreographer item, and Ray Love, Tucson, Ariz., for Woods.