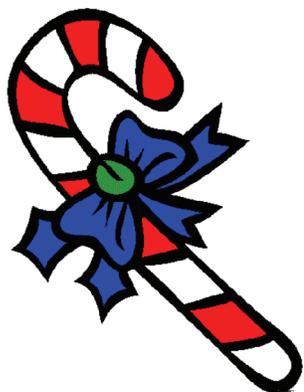


“Doubtless there is a precise and economical phrase in German meaning ‘the unfortunate telling of a story that one realizes too late is ill suited to the occasion.’ (My considerably rusted college German suggests ‘Die zu späte und ungeeignete Realisierung von der Ungehörigkeit von eine Geschichte erzählt,’ but I may be wrong.” — Dick Cavett



The Season

Set

Austin Dispatches No. 158

Dec. 2, 2012 (Internet Edition)

I know traditionally these Christmas newsletters are supposed to chronicle the year's personal or family milestones, but I must confess a dearth of that, at least in the holiday spirit.¹ There may be something next year, but it's all too tentative or preliminary to mention. So to fill space instead, I'll have to do shtick.²

If you receive this issue before Dec. 21, my two-year-old remarks about the Mayan end-of-the-world prophecy have held up. So far. Then, a co-worker asked if I'd seen the disaster movie "2012." I said since John Cusack stars in it, I knew it'd be a disaster flick no matter what the subject. To make it realistically terrifying, you'd have Americans enduring the abolition of the incandescent light bulb; the start of ObamaCare; President Obama's re-election over some statist Republican flunky; Olympics hype; and the inability of tourists to visit the Yucatan Peninsula to get away from all of the above because the locals are too spooked about the end of the world to book reservations. And it would star John Cusack ("I graduated high school for this?") and feature a wall-to-wall pop soundtrack that teen-age girls like.³

(However, if you receive this issue after Dec. 21, and the world has ended, feel free to disregard the above paragraph.)

I began 2012 by [staying home New Year's Eve](#) for the first time in 13 years. I scoured the listings but everything that remotely interested me was also inconvenient for reasons of traffic, parking or the likely mix of attendees. One venue deployed a New Year's Eve 1981/82 theme, but having written about the '80s intensively four times in the last four years, I was a bit weary of '80s nostalgia – certainly the way most other people do it, which tends to be either predictable or incredibly dorky. Moreover, most every event was crammed into downtown, where the city government also persisted in holding a family friendly event that ended a good 90 minutes short of midnight. Nothing to start a new year right like gypping the kids. Also, a friend cautioned me to be careful. So instead, I worked on a live socket with a spray bottle and a screwdriver while smoking a cigarette and digesting a double bacon cheeseburger.

My really big preoccupation this year has been researching, buying, installing and mastering a [new computer and its software](#). Recently, I replaced the original manufacturer's keyboard and mouse with wired versions, because the original wireless peripherals eat batteries like Christmas toys.⁴ A friend at NASA wrote that I did more research than anybody he knows about what computer to buy. Coming from him, that's saying some-

thing. I have a copy of a serious business plan for a prospective outer space mining company he wrote in his off time.⁵

[In April, I visited the family for a week](#) at their new residences. At dinner, my nephew Nicholas asked where I live.

“Texas .”

He thought about this. “Do you speak Spanish?”

“*Sí, claro.*”

For the extended Halloween celebrations , I attended a couple [as Mitt Romney](#), by parting my hair, graying the temples with talcum powder (\$1.77), and knotting the neckwear in my wardrobe closest in pattern to a rep tie (less than \$10 on eBay years ago). However, my costume may have been too subtle for everyone else – probably belonging to the 47 percent. I didn’t match the impact of Halloween 1980, when I impersonated Nixon with a dime store mask: “Let me make this perfectly clear: Trick or treat.” Yeah, I had a taste for satire even then. The adults laughed and probably gave me some extra candy.

Last month, Austin was revved up over the debut Formula 1 race that occurred without the numerous hitches and glitches even the organizers expected.⁶ As with New Year’s Eve, I’ve said repeatedly that Austin doesn’t have the layout or infrastructure to hold these big events without [creating gridlock in the city center](#). On the other hand, some college boy worries F1 could erase the city’s culture:

Austin has long been known for its liberal [*sic.*] politics, indie culture, predilection for “weirdness” and friendliness to the environment. F1, a glamorous, extravagant sport that has a reputation for catering to the super-wealthy, doesn’t really line up with that mentality. The globe-trotting billionaires following the race, who were denied their stated wish to hold decadent F1 parties on multimillion-dollar yachts on Town Lake, are noticeably out of place here. Even more jarring is that a city consistently ranked among the greenest in the country is now hosting a massive car race. F1 and the Circuit of the Americas have vigorously promoted their efforts to reduce carbon emissions, but the relatively small number of carbon offsets they paid for at the city’s urging does nothing to change the fact that the sport itself burns thousands of gallons of fossil fuels for the purposes of amusement.⁷

Put that way, F1’s almost worth the millions in government subsidies it cadged.⁸

A nationwide strike forced Hostess to file again for bankruptcy, because the parties to the labor dispute are a bunch of twinkies and ding dongs.⁹ Even as a child, I never cared much for Twinkies, and eventually I came around to my parents’ view that the other Hostess snacks weren’t worth the sin. At the same time, I was bewildered by the absence of Hostess’ subsidiary line Dolly Madison where I lived.¹⁰ How come angsty cartoon characters got to enjoy these snacks and I didn’t?¹¹ I didn’t try them until I moved to Texas. I have to say Dolly Madison was better than Hostess. Both had been obviously snapped up from the end caps at the super-market on the day of the strike – in marked contrast to people’s behavior during the [2008 meltdown](#).

That’s all I’ve got. Be sure to tip your waitresses.

Merry Christmas,

Dan

NOTES

¹ Siegel, Larry. "Year-End Family Greeting Letters We'd Like to See." Mad Jan. 1977: 29-31.

² Eisler, Dan. "Re: Merry Christmas." E-mail to Don McCaig, 11 Dec. 2011.

³ AD No. 130n53 (Feb. 17, 2010).

⁴ Boys' Toys of the Seventies and Eighties: Toy Pages From the Legendary Sears Christmas Wishbooks, 1970-1989. Ed. Thomas W. Holland. Calabasas, Calif.: Windmill Group, 2002; More Boys' Toys of the Seventies and Eighties: Toy Pages From the Great Montgomery Ward Christmas Catalogs, 1970-1985. Ed. Holland. Calabasas, Calif.: Windmill Group, 2002; Pogue, David. Windows 7: The Missing Manual. Sebastopol, Calif.: Pogue Press/O'Reilly, 2010: 750.

⁵ Eisler. "Re: The New System." E-mail to Chris Loyd, 11 Aug. 2012.

⁶ Maher, John. "F1's Roar Builds." AAS 16 Nov. 16 2012: A1+; Maly, David. "F1 Races to Austin." DT 15 Nov. 2012: 1-2; Toohey, Marty. "South Austin Sites Will Ferry Fans to F1 Circuit." AAS 9 Nov. 2012: A1+; Wear, Ben. "Union May Strike Within Days." AAS 10 Nov. 2012: A1+.

⁷ Stroud, Pete. "Global Attention From F1 Threatens Local Identity." DT 19 Nov. 2012: 4.

⁸ AD No. 134n33 (July 10, 2010).

⁹ Jenkins, Holman W. Jr. "The Media Choke on a Twinkie." WSJ 28 Nov. 2012, Eastern ed.: A13.

¹⁰ Budzick, Jamie. "Size Does Matter." Snack Food and Wholesale Bakery Mar. 2001: 20.

¹¹ Michaelis, David. Schulz and Peanuts: A Biography. New York City: Harper, 2007: 320.