

Make Sense for Just Pennies a Day!

Written by Alex Baer

Tuesday, 31 January 2012 17:00

Nothing much has been said about a vanishing species peculiar to our country. It once had a formidable range, swept the countryside in vast numbers. It was valued not just for its hide, but, for what it made us all seek. We are speaking of *Facts* now, about the few still left.

Oh, sure -- we still have blizzards of chatter, clouds of electronic bees stinging us this way and that, turning and spinning us, hither and -- yawn! Oh, my, this is dull, perhaps, but it's a murder investigation, too. See: Facts got booted from the national car, while it was in motion, and Facts got all roughed up and rumpled, then left for dead in a ditch. Facts deserved better than that.

For the most part since Facts died in the national discourse, we've done the expedient and easy thing -- shouting heavily-researched talking points, back and forth, letting opinion take over and rule, raucously. Raw data? Chuck it under the stool.

Now, in all the endless jousting, neither side budging, the tie could be broken, with a breakout of Facts. Thing is, no one's been trained to handle them, no one knows what to do. Broadcast facts to the people? It would gibberish to everyone by now, they'd have not a clue. Heck, they're all trained up for these Republican debates!

Yes, it's a tiresome, loathsome drudgery of a process, using Facts, learning to use them and wield them well. So much easier to spout speculation and opinionated tripe. *What's a population to do?*

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Bulletin: One of the last remaining Facts has just been admitted to the ICU. Mother and father to Logic, parents to the Constitution and Magna Carta, just to name two of its offspring, the hospital has come alive with well-wishers and the concerned, family and friends -- we see Truth, Justice, Freedom, even the adopted American-Ways. We'll keep you posted...

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Homer spoke of "Aletheia" only in the Iliad and Odyssey -- don't panic, it's a short journey, not an epic quest -- a word he used in opposition to lies and deception. He went on to use other words, too: *true*, *genuine*, *accurate*, and *precise*, for *atrekes*, *eteos*, *etetumos*, and *etumos*.*

Back up on dry land, all the oars up and back in the boat, we see the tradition continuing, albeit with a more happening and hapless Homer, the yellowish, doughnut-handed, still-out-to-sea, Mr. Simpson -- the one remarking of *Truthiness*.

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It is here, in the Looney Tunes world of today, that both Homers meet, link up, and shake hands. Here, the siren song consists of technology's billing and cooing, the promise that it will save us again, not dash us on the rocks.

And so, both Homers were drafted, to run the new, privately-run, public service agency, C-STOPS -- Citizens for Some Truth, for Once, for Pete's Sake.

Here, legions of fact-checkers follow their calling, to provide high-quality evaluations of the things people and groups say and do, indicating for the public a score indicating the factual nature of the comments or deeds.

The goal of C-STOPS is not truth, per se; the task set itself is providing Americans with a trustworthy, neutral fact-grading service, in the belief that so doing will inevitably lead to a cleaner marketplace of ideas -- a fully factual one -- so that the engaged public itself might then, itself, gather up and synthesize Truth by the armloads.

It was what the Founders believed, and stated, in the Constitution, just jazzed up with electronics, made real with earbuds through a box with controls.

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Without fact, the Founders and C-STOPS realized, there would be no logic, no truth; without these, there was wheel-spinning in endless mud holes, no progress to anywhere, just sliding around all over -- like we have now, going in circles, going nowhere.

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C-STOPS was an add-on, a monthly consumer subscription service, that transmitted additional information meant to accompany broadcast and other electronic media. There was no censorship, no attempt to jam any source. It was merely another content provider, designed to function in tandem with any other program or source.

On its own bands, C-STOPS would piggyback, side-saddle, with any programming source, adding its own dimension to the original. There was no law, of course, to broadcasting commentary about something being observed on any other channel -- and certainly no law that said consumers could not use more than one signal at a time.

The original sources, these A's, were combined with a wide range of add-on signals from C-STOPS, the B's -- and the public assembled them, in their own minds and mindfully so, into a new product, the C's. Easy math: Original signal A plus C-STOPS add-on signal B equals Graded fact conclusion C.

The subscription service cost just pennies a day, and it was true: Most of the funding came from wealthy people and groups who believed that, as one put it, "Making sense was still worth giving a few dollars and cents."

C-STOPS graded only for fact -- was something factual, or was something all horse hockey, fabricated from whole cloth? Or, was it something in between? There were fairness and accuracy reviews, and their neutrality held. The group had no axes to grind, just graded the facts of the matter, of the thing at hand.

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Was it or was it not fact? If not wholly so, how much so -- how much was fact, how much was filler, or uncertainty, or pure poppycock?

When Senator Yadda of Whereverville, for example, said more money had been spent in the last year on saving wetlands than on corporate tax breaks, the folks at C-STOPS looked it all up, then provided the score for that tale: 100 was dead on, and a zero was a dead lie. Few remarks tilted at one extreme or another. Most ratings were in between, and seen right on the screen.

Subscribers received a full information kit explaining how the service worked, what the color codes and number ratings meant, how the ratings were grouped and decided on set criteria, and so on. In no time at all, subscribers knew precisely how much fact they were receiving. And, as they were armed with, well, more facts, they asked for higher grades of same from their leaders, they asked for some more.

There was a very slight delay in watching it all live, getting feedback on the fly. Some subscribers enjoyed flying by the seat of their pants in terms of timeliness, while other subscribers preferred the in-depth features associated with recording one of the usual channels, then playing it back, a couple hours or days later, with the complete coverage package provided by C-STOPS, once that group had a chance to do more analysis of what had been said and done.

It worked on radio, too, not just on tveeve, and on any channel you liked. There was an added voice and some sound tones to make sense of it all. Your choice of man or woman was available, speaking in various languages, and speaking styles, and with a level of commentary running alongside subscribers' favorite programs.

Instead of on-screen color bars or twitching number displays -- far less complicated than current informational scrolls, too -- there would be sound cues alerting consumers to fibs or to whoppers, and to brief vocal feedback.

You could even choose the emotional range of commentary, using the exclusive Emote-O-Meter, which could be set from standard neutral commentary, to either extreme -- from the hot rabid froth of invective, and inventive curse phrases, excoriating away, hurled into

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the conversation like a flame-thrower from the sidelines, to the opposite pole, where calm and tranquil and cautious thoughts were gently expressed, would come in from the sides, like feathers alighting on a bed of warm sighs.

Clips right on a belt or any strap, all Bluetoothed, with interactive ear buds, and in a variety of colors and controls -- all upgradable of course, to any level of subscription, and so small it'll never get in your way!

C-STOPS would spread out, and use its service with any source -- celebrity voices grading facts on the news, or commenting on cooking shows, catching folks up with soap operas, doing color commentary on sports. The tie-ins were everywhere, assimilated vertically, in both directions, all over: Bowling shows -- popular in the first year, for some reason -- would have their commentators show up and be part of dramatic programming; people playing chefs on TV would end up opening restaurants, and commenting on cooking shows via C-STOPS.

It was an explosion of formats and information and cross-pollination. Every time C-STOPS grew a new channel for fun, it could hire more legions to get the fact-checking done. There were even special investigative journalists and their overseer panels added after a while -- they became well-respected and made heroes, hailed as truth warriors, wherever they went.

Before long, C-STOPS was a must-have, like a cellular phone. Everyone knew how it all worked. Easy as pie. Lying and hiding got harder and harder to do. Eventually, slowly, the people were trained again on how to hear truth, how to find fact and how to use fact in truthful discussions they had.

They told each other what they thought about a proposal, the specifics, and in detail - not how it made them feel, not how it felt.

The people, at last, could find facts with both hands and a flashlight -- which was the start of making new truths, based on what was really honest and real and actually true.

Until C-STOPS, we were stuck on manual, had to do all the fact-grading ourselves. Then, they

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came along, and C-STOPS helped out, they got the ball rolling, they helped us get ourselves trained all the way back up.

C-STOPS, the group, assisted, the histories will no doubt say, until the real C-STOPS, the real crap-stoppers and sifters -- human minds -- could take over, could function once more.

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** Thanks to Raul Corazzon and "Theory and History of Ontology."*