

Enduring Messages & Disposable Thoughts

Written by Alex Baer

Saturday, 01 September 2012 16:34

We've had to low-crawl on our stomachs and chests all week, under razor wire and raking machine gun fire, but we've finally made it, safe: The Weekend.

Relax, enjoy your coffee, no rush. There'll be little mention of politics here today, save for a quick thanks to the cosmos for the *Tampa-tantrum* finally ending. (Yes, now that you ask, I *will* have a little something in my coffee, after all.

Whooo-ah

.)

OK, one more nudge at the Republican fright-fest just ended: It is testament to the power of lies and foolish nonsense that the Mississippi River river ran backwards for 24 hours -- *even though Tampa was relatively far away!*

Of course, to play fair, that gathering was backward before it was begun. (And, yes, of course, purists, Hurricane Isaac had something to do with that, too.)

Catching up with the rest of the week:

Canadian police in St.-Louis-de-Blandford, northeast of Montreal, are faced with a sticky situation: the theft of 10 million pounds of maple syrup, worth more than \$30 million.

Thieves appear to have siphoned off stocks, leaving barrels looking undisturbed. So, for the next little while, be cautious of anyone offering you some *hot* maple syrup -- although *warmed* is still perfectly fine to accept.

(You know: After the pancake landing of wafflers in Florida scampering around to save their own bacon, with not a drop of sweet reason in use there, here is one more sweet reason to consider Canadian citizenship:)

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Canada provides three-quarters of the world's maple syrup and two-thirds of our own. Good to know, especially since U.S. producers had a catastrophic 2012 season. Maple trees, you see, like cold winter weather -- something in short supply during global greenhouse conditions.

(Thank you, Canada, for being our main supplier of maple syrup, and among our chief foreign suppliers of crude oil as well -- more than what Saudi Arabia supplies.)

And, from enduring friendship to enduring messages: A diplomatic mailbag from India was spotted sitting on top of the snow in the French Alps. The jute bag had been lost 46 years earlier, in a crash of an Air India plane at that site in January of 1966.

Still, better late-arriving mail than never: A Norwegian art gallery admitted their 1658 Rembrandt etching worth up to \$8,500 has been lost in the mail. The gallery's chairman said they had used regular mail because couriers and insurance were "quite expensive."

Stunning honesty (*pay attention, Republicans*) served with heaping idiocy (*look away, Republicans, you're already full up*).

Given our current business climate, it makes one wonder what artful interpretation of the truth a U.S. chairman or CEO might paint in a similar situation, in order to keep one's own butt sling-free.

Another enduring message? Scottish skipper Andrew Leaper has set a new world record after finding the oldest message in a bottle, plucking it right from the ocean. The 98-year-old postcard-in-a-bottle was launched in 1914, beating the previous record by 5 years.

And, of lightning striking the same place, mull over this: The bottled message was found while Leaper piloted the same fishing boat from which the previous record-setter was snagged from the sea.

Leaper said, "It was an amazing coincidence. It's like winning the lottery twice."

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Yes, well -- you win some, you lose some: Sweden's spy agency, Sapo, is being grilled by government accountants for its excessive James-Bond-themed party thrown for 1,000 staff members in June. It's a sensitive issue because the agency just went through a round of -- you guessed it -- budget cuts.

The bill for the casino tables, gala dinner, and entertainment by celebrities, comedians, and a big band? \$804,000. (Beat you by \$4,000, GSA -- take *that*. *Hie!*)

Now, a point of fact, speaking of music: when a piano tuner is working, it is now safe to say the piano is not the only thing being tuned. Research shows structural changes to tuners' brains -- their work is quite literally changing their minds.

Researchers in the UK say changes in the hippocampus of piano tuners' brains are similar to those seen in local taxi drivers as that group builds up knowledge of London's labyrinthine streets.

Oh, and a question: To tune a piano, or tuna fish? Bluegill sunfish, actually, in this case. At Princeton University, fish are playing underwater video games as their predatory behaviors are investigated.

Senior researcher, Dr. Iain Couzin says, "It would be fascinating to understand whether the fish learned to play the game better over time."

(Wonder if he'd be willing to design an experiment in which predatory Republican behaviors are investigated?)

Oh, sorry. To make up for that political lapse, perhaps this will help:

Researchers have used video games in animal research before, including cockroaches in a virtual forest, and cats batting away at pixel-mice on touchscreen devices.

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Yes, all in all, I'd agree: It *has* been a cat-and-mouse-game of a week, no doubt about it.

Mississippi River: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-19435026>

Maple Syrple: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-19440465>

and:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/08/31/160401054/thieves-hit-warehouse-holding-30-million-of-canadian-maple-syrup>

Mailbag: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-194197813>

Rembrandt oops: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-19366266>

Message in a bottle: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-19422354>

Double oh-oh: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-19392257>

Who's tuning what -- or whom? <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-19398413>

Video games: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-19368532>

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Oil imports:

<http://www.npr.org/2012/04/11/150444802/where-does-america-get-oil-you-may-be-surprised>

and:

http://www.eia.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/data_publications/company_level_imports/current/import.html