

# Infoholics

*Curiosity in bizarre stories has few limits*

I've heard that the first step toward rehabilitation is to admit that you have a problem.

Hello, my name is Jennifer, and I'm an infoholic. Useless information is my passion, and news is my weakness.

I've tried everything I could think of to break this information habit. I've tried watching cartoons instead of news. I've tried shopping, napping, boozing, even staring at the walls. I've even been known to study when I feel the need for an information fix.

But somehow, I always end up near a television set around 5:30 p.m., ready for the nightly news. Or worse yet, I find myself tuning in to CNN Headline News for a midday dose.

This isn't my fault. It's the media's fault. They've done this to me.

They've got me hooked on having a quick and easy glimpse of a few gripping stories at any time. Brutal murder in (fill in name of U.S. city). Deadly war/revolution/famine in (fill in name of foreign country). The trial of (fill in name of celebrity) continues. And so on. Oh, I forgot to mention the medical or nutrition-related breakthrough, failure or retraction of the week.

That's all I should need to know. I can hold my head high, secure in the conviction that I am informed. I can feel superior to those of you who tuned in to some vapid talk show to find out how to cope when your boyfriend parts his hair too far to the left. My information might be useless, but I'm sure it's relevant to something.

The problem is that I'm not in this for the sober, relevant news. They've sucked me in with the bizarre and melodramatic, and I'm in it for more of the same.

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**Jennifer Mapes**

*"Watching the news can be richly rewarding, as it was on the day when I tuned in just in time to see then-President George Bush throw up at a Japanese dinner party."*

that I probably couldn't have made up myself.

The news also can be excruciating. I canceled my subscription to Newsweek after the third or fourth O.J. Simpson cover story in a row. But, as it turned out, I had to leave the country to escape the coverage of the Simpson trial. (When I mentioned the trial to my Belgian friend in Brussels, she responded with the sweetest question I think I'll ever hear: "Who is O.J. Simpson?")

I've noticed that O.J. is back in the news lately. I wish he'd go away. I've had it with the Whitewater farce, and I'm sick of the 1996 Presidential campaign, even though it hasn't really started yet.

At times like this, the news just isn't strange enough for me. I feel a nagging impulse to seek out more absurd and unlikely stories. I am driven to the disreputable fringe of news and information.

Every now and then, I am taken with the irresistible urge to read the Weekly World News.

I bought a copy of the WWN a few days ago, when I was gasping for an information fix and unable to tolerate another word about Bosnia or Hillary's billing records. I felt cheap and unworthy, having suddenly lowered myself to the level of Sally Jesse Raphael's most ardent admirers.

That low-rent, greasy feeling didn't last long. I got caught up in the information rush, and the Weekly World News supplied me with a wide range of thrilling headlines. This paper delivers. "Banana peel kills firewalker," I read, and better yet, "Camel eats punk rocker's green hair." I learned that I could lose five pounds a week with witchcraft, and also that three out of five Americans are reincarnated in Brazil.

The thing I appreciate most about the WWN is its international focus. It's nice to know that the United States hasn't entirely cornered the market on weirdness. A man in Romania was arrested for biting a werewolf. And a plumber in Spain made \$12,000 off senior citizens by claiming to rid their pipes of demonic possession.

But even the WWN leaves me flat at times, and I am forced to humble myself before the greatest purveyor of useless information known to humankind: the Internet.

My hunger for weird information was finally sated yesterday on a web page. I got caught up in the conspiracy theory pages and found my credibility stretched to the limit. Bill Clinton, someone claimed, is not only a draft-dodging commie liberal, but also a Vatican operative working to steer the United States away from the influence of the British aristocracy.

OK. I've had enough.

Mapes is a senior advertising and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

# Everyone benefits from lower taxes



**Mona Charen**

I loved Steve Forbes' response to the question: Wouldn't you personally benefit from a flat tax?

He said (I'm paraphrasing): If you change the tax system, I'll do all right. If you don't change the tax system, I'll do all right. The question is what's best for America.

Exactly. Forbes' Republican competitors are sounding an awful lot like Democrats as they scorn Forbes for being too wealthy.

The notion that Steve Forbes would undertake a quixotic run for the presidency in order to knock a few bucks off his tax liability is absurd. For one thing, it's a pretty poor investment. Even if personal gain were his motive, it would take decades for him to recoup in taxes saved what he's spending on this race. He'd be much better off investing in Treasury bills and letting others worry about the tax code.

The very rich, as Jack Kemp never tires of pointing out, are already rich. They can avoid taxes in a thousand innovative ways. But if you cut tax rates, you create incentives for the wealthy to invest their money and thus create opportunities for others to become rich.

The debate over taxes — flat and otherwise — is like a Rorschach test for Democrats and Republicans. What you see in the tax says a great deal about who you are. It is clear that many Democrats would continue to oppose a flat tax even if it could be proved that it would benefit everyone in society — poor, middle class and rich alike — because it would provide, in their eyes, a "windfall for the rich."

Of course, letting people keep more of what is already theirs hardly constitutes a "windfall." Moreover, what do the Democrats think happens to the rich when their taxes are raised? Do they suddenly have to cut back on caviar and fast boats? Are they forced to fly coach? And when tax rates are lowered, do they suppose that the rich suddenly decide they can afford that Mercedes Benz after all? Not likely. So those who worry excessively about the impact of the tax code on the wealthy are merely spinning their wheels and indulging their own envious passions.

Moreover, in their zeal to ensure that the rich not benefit

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from any tax scheme, they wind up punishing the middle class.

As Daniel Mitchell noted in The Wall Street Journal, the Kemp Commission tracked three periods of reduced taxation in this century. Each was followed by an economic boom that resounded to the benefit of the entire society. In the 1920s, taxes were slashed three times, reducing the top rate from 73 percent to 25 percent. Three things followed. The period known as the Roaring '20s brought unprecedented prosperity to the nation. Tax receipts surged by 61 percent. And the share of the tax burden borne by the rich increased from 44 percent in 1921 to 78 percent in 1928.

The pattern was similar in the 1960s. Starting under President John F. Kennedy, the top rate was reduced from 91 percent in 1963 to 70 percent in 1965. Once again, tax revenues to the Treasury climbed — this time by 16 percent between 1963 and 1966. And again, the proportion of taxes paid by the rich increased — from 12 percent to 15 percent.

In the 1980s, the pattern was the same. Though the mainstream press and the Democrats have tried to rewrite history to establish that supply-side economics was "discredited," the exact opposite is true. After the Reagan tax cuts, the economy surged, increased tax revenues by 28 percent (inflation-adjusted). The share of taxes paid by the top 10 percent of earners rose from 48 percent in 1981 to 57 percent in 1988. The top 1 percent of earners saw their portion of the tax burden rise from 18 percent in 1981 to 28 percent in 1988. (Yes, there were huge deficits in the 1980s, but that was because spending outstripped income, not because tax cuts robbed the Treasury of funds.)

The 1990s have featured higher tax rates and slower growth for the economy as a whole.

In other words, you cannot punish the rich without hurting the rest of us. But if you let the rich (and the rest of us) keep more of what they earn, everyone benefits.

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# Jackpot

*Americans' obsession with gambling lives on*

So, did you win any money from the Big Sunday Game?

Americans love to gamble — it's a national pastime, right alongside an obsession with cars, Late Night with David, and the big Hollywood sign.

I was meeting a friend for dinner the other night at a restaurant, and while I was waiting, noticed several video slot machines permanently cemented to the bar. Loud, large and black, they were all occupied.

Talking about them later, my friend made the comment that they brought in more than the pull-tabs (as if there's any difference).

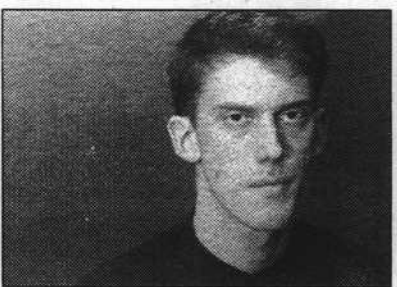
The lure seems to be irresistible: bright colors, dazzling lights, all proclaiming YOU TOO CAN BE THE BIG WINNER! A miniaturized Vegas right before your eyes, only without the shows.

It's human nature to gamble: The action is a matter of degrees.

Whether you gamble on the meter where your car is parked, make a two-bit bet on the Friday night pool game, or experiment with a new lifestyle, it's all the same. It's all about risk vs. payoff. The games we play are just visible reminders and reinforcers.

And sports gambling aside — which, though illegal, is irrelevant to the issue at hand — we have so many ways to choose and lose: Slots, Powerball, scratch tickets, Blackjack, Twenty-one, Roulette, Craps, state lotteries. Even Bingo is not innocent.

Advertisers capitalize on our fascination with chance. The junk mail that we receive daily ties the consumer product to the adrenalin



**Fred Poyner**

*"The real losers are those poor souls who invest everything into the roll of the dice. Family, friends, identity, self-respect, income — it all disappears with the pull of a one-armed bandit."*

rush at reading, "You may be the next million dollar customer!" We'll spend the money just on the chance we might like what we're buying.

The real losers are those poor souls who invest everything into the roll of the dice. Family, friends, identity, self-respect, income — it all disappears with the pull of a one-armed bandit.

The winners? To date I'll tip my hat to the American Indians. Megacasinos have given the tribes the life that was promised to them by our government long ago.

The image of the gambler, particularly the Western version,

holds a romantic appeal for many people. We want to be the one holding a Royal Flush while betting the farm. Success measured by the size of a poker-chip pile.

Sadly, games of chance no longer represent a leisurely activity for the majority. Slim as the odds are, they become the only avenue of hope for entire city neighborhoods: the hope for a better life. In the process, lives are gambled away, with both time and money wasted.

Laws exist to regulate the gambling bug, but no one likes to be told how to play the game, or that they're over the credit limit. Can you imagine someone asking James Bond for a voucher?

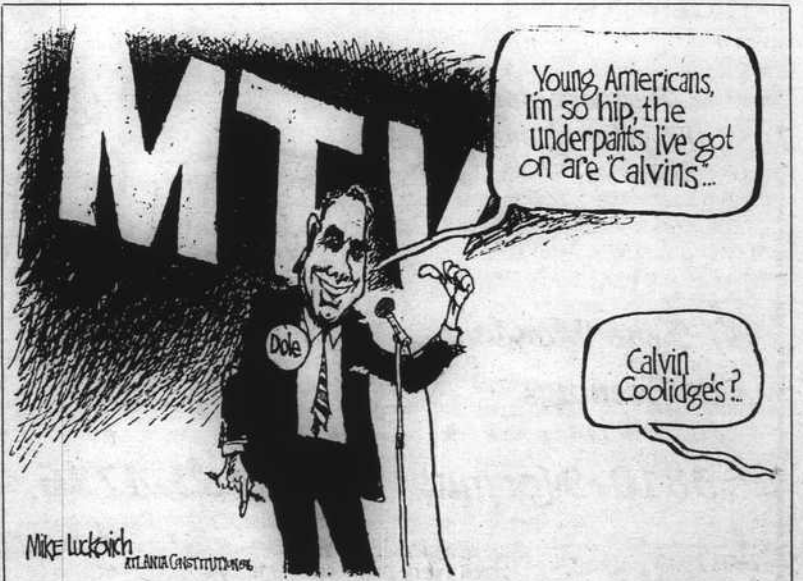
The guy down the block faithfully buying his weekly lottery ticket is your neighbor, and he doesn't appreciate being told that he's throwing away his paycheck, even if it isn't Monte Carlo.

Our shrines to gambling have built entire cities. Gambling pays for the new roof to your church through raffles, funds crime syndicates, and bankrolls the tourist industry of many countries.

Someone once said gambling was the opiate of the masses. Some gamble for fun, while others are hopelessly addicted. The machines we construct to fuel the fever will be around long after we are gone — what will they say about us as a people and a nation?

Whether you play and pay or not, the gambling goes on and on. If you need me, I'll be at the racetrack.

Poyner is a graduate student in museum studies and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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