

January White Noise

As I start the car, I turn off the radio before the first note or word can be heard. The radio is neither soothing nor relaxing – it is perplexing and full of stories that leave me wanting to know more. It is best to avoid it on days like today. There are too many questions without answers already trapped in the upholstery, and I don't want to add to them.

I change the gear shift from “P” to “D” and it changes me from forty-four to three.

Pulling onto Fifth Street, the questions start to percolate out of the fabric and coagulate in the air. They come slow at first, and then begin to intensify their pace like a coffee maker reaching its climax. Even though I live five minutes from campus, I know immediately that it will be a long ride home:

- Why is that old man walking across the street carrying a plastic bag and a belt? Where could anyone be going that they would need to carry an extra belt? What could be in the bag that is so bad you couldn't just put the belt in there for fear of tainting it?
- Why do the elderly find it so important to make sure no one sees the hearing aid they are wearing? If their Beltone isn't invisible to others, they worry about standing out.
- Why do those with an inflated sense of hipness find it necessary to live with a Bluetooth headset coming out of their ear? Instead of wanting the device to be invisible, they want to look like they misplaced their flash light. Shouldn't

Miracle Ear just make a hearing aid that also looks like a giant laser pointer and be done with it?

- Did I ever eat that bag of lettuce I bought? I don't remember doing so, but if I didn't its got to be putrid by now.
- How much is a talent really worth? In the Parable of the Talents, a man going on a journey gave money to three servants: one got five talents, another two, and the last got one. I read that a talent is worth 6000 drachma and Wikipedia says a drachma is roughly the equivalent of one day's pay for a skilled worker. I don't know any skilled worker who makes less than \$100/day and that means this man left the equivalent of three million dollars to one of his servants. Even the lowest servant got over half a million. Who would do something like that? There's either something wrong with my math, or Wikipedia got hit by Colbert again.
- Luke tells the same story, but the top servant got ten minas, and each mina is worth three month's wages. That works out to about \$60,000 today. Somebody ought to publish a good conversion chart for prices.
- If CVS carried Valomilk, would it still be priced over a dollar like it is at Cracker Barrel, or would they charge what they charge for all other candy? There ought to be some way to convert prices today between CVS, Cracker Barrel, and Wal-Mart. If you don't include Wal-Mart in any list today, it's pretty much meaningless.
- Speaking of meaningless, why don't they have trucks that can vacuum up fog? They plow for snow. They salt for ice. Why can't they suck up enough fog to keep it off roads for a while? That's funny, but no one else will realize it.

- What would happen if I recorded a laugh track and used it in class? Instead of everyone staring blankly wondering if I'm serious or not, the track would queue them in that it had indeed been sarcasm. An applause sign would be kind of nice, too - - - I'll bet you can make something like that in PowerPoint pretty easily.
- The bumper sticker on that truck says, "Get hooked on fishing, not on drugs." Are those two mutually exclusive? Does there come a time in every young man's life when he has to make a choice between these two? Could you segment out all nine-year old boys into two groups: those who don't mind handling worms, and those who should start thinking about methadone?
- Has a study ever been done showing that fishermen are less likely to mix crystal meth in their garage than swimmers? I would think that fishermen are more likely to have a garage and that seems to be a basic requirement for a lab of any size.
- If I stop paying my sewage bill, will they really shut it off? In the city, the amount you pay is based on the amount of water you use. I live in the country and have a well, and I pay a high, flat rate. What could they really do if I just stop paying it? Would they put a lien on the house? Would the Board of Education's budget come up short next year by my \$42-a-month? Would they have to cancel some programs?
- Why is there such a discussion about full-day kindergarten in a state that does not even require kindergarten? Shouldn't we first pass legislation saying that kids need to attend kindergarten, and then work on the full-day aspect?
- Why do the neighbors insist on putting out their trash two days before the pickup? Are they worried about starving dogs in the neighborhood?

- If all roads lead to Rome, did they need signs? Couldn't you say that all driveways and alleys lead there too?

A turn of the key silences the car's engine, and the questions plummet back into the fabric leaving me alone once again. For a moment, I just sit and look through the windshield then I step onto my driveway and begin the short walk to the front door. The monotonous sound of my shoes on the cement sound something like the pistons of an engine firing and suddenly the questions start anew:

- Did I lock the car?
- What was the gas gauge at?
- Did I have a book with me?