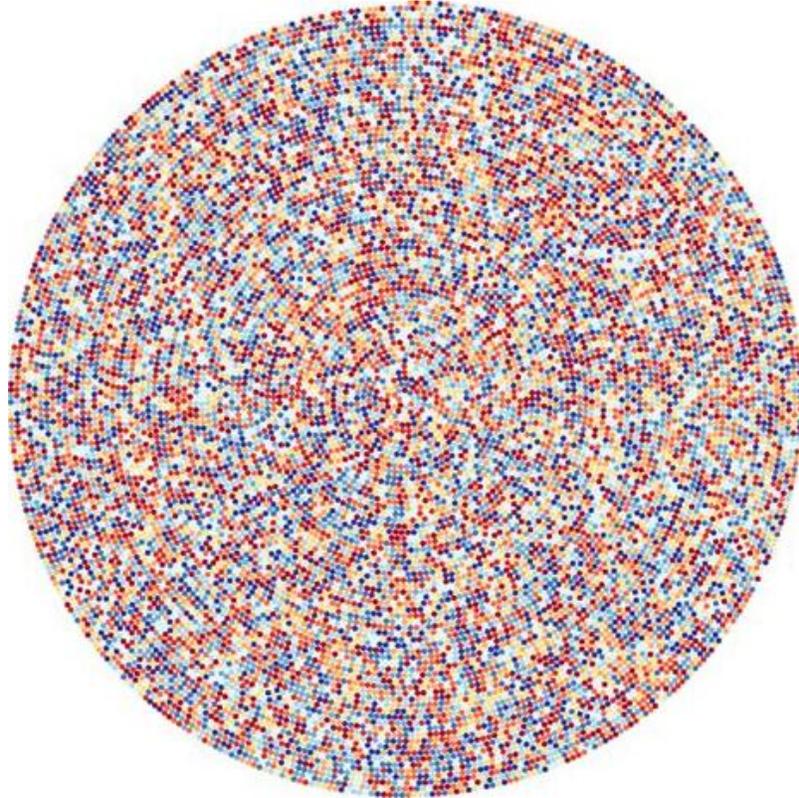


Ode to Happiness for Sunday March 14 2021



Day 2021...Stair Step to Infinity



As March 14 approaches, it's time to get ready to celebrate Pi Day! It's the annual holiday that pays tribute to the number that results from dividing any circle's circumference by its diameter. Pi is used all the time at NASA to explore Earth, Mars, and worlds beyond.

Pi Day comes around only once a year, giving us a reason to chow down on our favorite sweet and savory pies while we appreciate the mathematical marvel that helps NASA explore Earth, the solar system, and beyond. There's no better way to observe this day than by getting students exploring space right along with NASA by doing the math in our Pi Day Challenge.

**3.1415926535897932384626433832795028841971693993751058209749445923
07816406286208998628034825342117067982148086513282306647093844609
55058223172535940812848111745028410270193852110555964462294895493
03819644288109756659334461284756482337867831652712019091456485669
23460348610454326648213393607260249141273724587006606315588174881
52092096282925409171536436789259036001133053054882046652138414695**

...and there's more where these came from is you need them

=====

Van Gogh Painting Unveiled for the First Time Since It Was Painted in 1887



"Street scene in Montmartre (Impasse des Deux Frères and the Pepper Mill)" (1887), oil on canvas, 46.1 x 61.3 centimeters.

Image courtesy of Sotheby's

By Grace Ebert

After spending more than a century in a private collection, one of Vincent van Gogh's artworks has been shown to the public for the first time since the Dutch artist painted it in the spring of 1887. "Street scene in Montmartre (Impasse des Deux Frères and the Pepper Mill)" depicts a couple walking on a windy day in front of an entertainment hub in Paris. Full of color and vitality, the landscape marks van Gogh's turn to his distinctive Impressionist style.

Prior to being put up for auction, only a small, black-and-white photograph taken in 1972 existed of the painting that's reminiscent of some of the artist's other works. The lively street is thought to be the same as that in "Impasse des Deux Frères," which currently hangs at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, and similarly depicts a mill and flags promoting the cabaret and bar through the gates. According to The Art Newspaper, there's speculation about how the family obtained "Street scene in

Montmartre," considering many of van Gogh's artworks at the time were gifted to his brother, Theo.

Pending COVID-19 precautions, the work is slated for short exhibitions in Amsterdam, Hong Kong, and Paris throughout March.

=====

Poetry for Today

A Note from a Friend that Includes a Poem



[This is from Darryl Cloud, who rode his bike from the Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot, San Diego CA to it's sister facility at Parris Island, SC to raise money for the Semper Fi Fund]

"Attached is a VERY special poem, I don't think I've shared it with you. The author was my granddaughter's sixth-grade teacher (2016). In the spring after my bike ride, the teacher invited me to present to the class.

"The class trip to Washington, D.C. was about two weeks away and they planned to place flowers at the base of every panel with the name of a Miami County, OH Vet.

"I asked them to place a flower at the base of Larry Helber's panel (Larry's home is not far from Miami County, OH). At the conclusion of my presentation, my granddaughter and her teacher read the poem and presented it to me.

[Larry Helber was a squadron mate of mine in 1965, who along with three others disappeared on a flight into North Vietnam. I spoke of them in Phantom Over Vietnam, when in 1984 they were held as Missing in Action. Subsequently, Larry, Al Pitt, Doyle Sprick, and Dale Booze have been declared Killed in Action.]

“Because the Vietnam Vets Day is approaching and if you feel it is appropriate, you’re more than welcome to include the poem in Ode to Happiness”

Darryl E. Cloud

The poem as it was presented to Darryl is here. You’ll want to read it



Vietnam Poem.pdf

=====

Care to Hear What Mars is Saying to Us Today?



https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/perseverance-rovers-supercam-science-instrument-delivers-first-results?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=nasajpl&utm_content=daily20210310-1

My guess is this is not the last we’ll be hearing from the Red Planet. Granted this is not what you’d call scintillating conversation, but for certain it provides hope and perspective to a world dominated by fears rather than dreams of things to come.

=====

Don’t Mess with Grandma in Court



behind the voiceactors

Lawyers should never ask grandmas a question if they aren't prepared for the answer!

In a trial, a small-town prosecuting attorney called his first witness, an elderly grandmother to the stand.

He approached her and asked; "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?"

She responded, "Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy, and frankly, you're a big disappointment to me..

You lie, cheat on your wife, manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a big shot when you haven't the brains to realize you never will amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you.."

The lawyer was stunned! Not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney (the opponent's lawyer)?"

She again replied, "Why, yes, I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster. He's lazy, bigoted, and has a drinking problem. He can't build a normal relationship with anyone and his law practice is one of the worst in the state. Not to mention he cheated on his wife with three different women. One of them was your wife. ..Yes I know him."

The defense attorney almost died.

The judge asked both lawyers to approach the bench and in a quiet voice said:

"If either of you rascals asks her if she knows me, I'll send you to jail for contempt of court!"

=====

Rapid 3D Printing Method Moves Toward 3D-Printed Organs



By Cory Nealon

Ruogang Zhao, associate professor of biomedical engineering. University at Buffalo

“The technology we’ve developed is 10-50 times faster than the industry standard, and it works with large sample sizes that have been very difficult to achieve previously.”

“ It looks like science fiction: A machine dips into a shallow vat of translucent yellow goo and pulls out what becomes a life-sized hand.

The hand, which would take six hours to create using conventional 3D printing methods, demonstrates what University at Buffalo engineers say is progress toward 3D-printed human tissue and organs — biotechnology that could eventually save countless lives lost due to the shortage of donor organs.

“The technology we’ve developed is 10-50 times faster than the industry standard, and it works with large sample sizes that have been very difficult to achieve previously,” says the study’s co-lead author Ruogang Zhao, PhD, associate professor of biomedical engineering.

The work is described in a study published Feb. 15 in the journal *Advanced Healthcare Materials*.

It centers on a 3D printing method called stereolithography and jelly-like materials known as hydrogels, which are used to create, among things, diapers, contact lenses and scaffolds in tissue engineering.

The latter application is particularly useful in 3D printing, and it’s something the research team spent a major part of its effort optimizing to achieve its incredibly fast and accurate 3D printing technique.

"Our method allows for the rapid printing of centimeter-sized hydrogel models. It significantly reduces part deformation and cellular injuries caused by the prolonged exposure to the environmental stresses you commonly see in conventional 3D printing methods," says the study's other co-lead author, Chi Zhou, PhD, associate professor of industrial and systems engineering.

Researchers say the method is particularly suitable for printing cells with embedded blood vessel networks, a nascent technology expected to be a central part of the production of 3D-printed human tissue and organs.

First authors of the study include former UB students Nanditha Anandakrishnan, PhD, now a postdoctoral researcher at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and Hang Ye, PhD, now a research scientist at SprintRay Inc. Zipeng Guo, a current PhD candidate in Zhou's lab, also is a first author.

Additional co-authors at UB are from the Department of Biomedical Engineering, which is a joint program of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences and the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences; the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering; the Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering; and the Department of Medicine in the Jacobs School.

Other study co-authors are from the VA Western New York Healthcare System; the Department of Cell Stress Biology at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center; and the Department of Biomedical and Chemical Engineering at Syracuse University.

The work was supported with funding from the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering of the National Institutes of Health. The UB School of Engineering and Applied Sciences and the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences provided additional funding.

=====

Church Ladies With Typewriters



Weird News Santa Fe

They're Back! Those wonderful Church Bulletins! Thank God for the church ladies with typewriters. These sentences actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced at church services:

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

The sermon this morning: "Jesus Walks on the Water."

The sermon tonight: "Searching for Jesus."

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

Miss Charlene Mason sang "I will not pass this way again," giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Next Thursday there will be try-outs for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What Is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.

Pot-luck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and medication to follow.

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

This evening at 7 PM there will be a hymn singing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the Congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.

The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church basement

Friday at 7 PM. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

And this one just about sums them all up:
The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new campaign slogan last Sunday: "I Upped My Pledge - Up Yours."

=====

Escalators for Speed; Stairs for Fun



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lXh2n0aPyw>

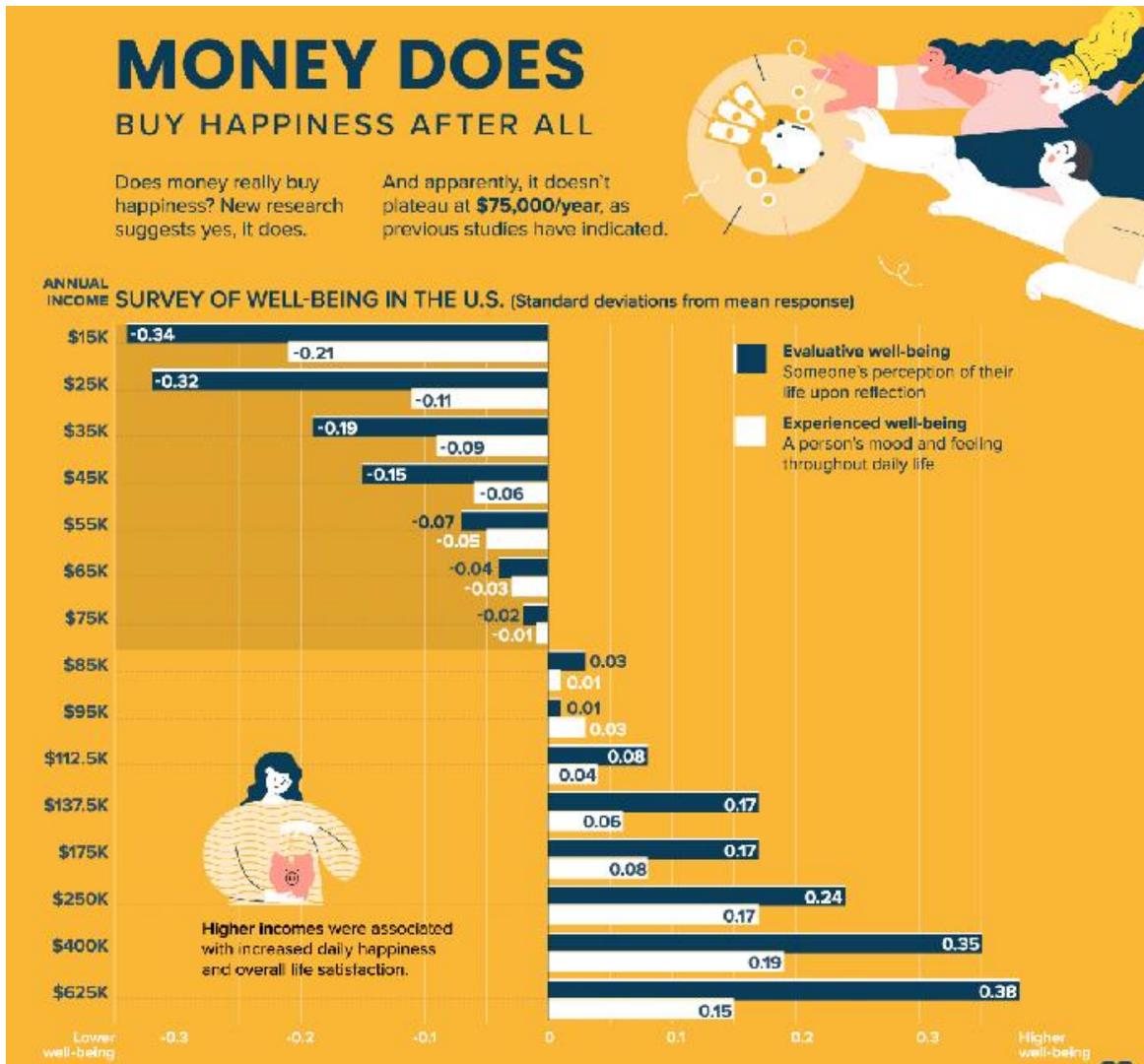
Doing scales was within my musical capabilities. I like it.

=====

The emotional support dog after I get done telling it my problems.



=====



The Briefing

- Previous research has indicated that money stops buying happiness after **\$75,000/year**
- However, new research finds a strong correlation between income and happiness, trending upwards even after **\$80,000/year**

In One Chart: Money Can Buy Happiness After All

What's the relationship between money and happiness? Previous studies have indicated that, while money can in fact buy happiness, it plateaus at approximately **\$75,000/year**.

However, new research suggests otherwise.

Using over a million real-time reports from a large U.S. sample group, a recent study found that happiness increases linearly with reported income (logarithmic), and continues to rise beyond the **\$80,000/year** mark.

Below, we'll provide more details on the research methodology, while touching on a few possible reasons why higher incomes may improve people's happiness levels.

How is Happiness Measured?

Past research on happiness relative to income has relied on retrospective data, which leaves room for human memory errors. In contrast, this new study uses real-time, logged data from a mood tracking app, allowing for a more accurate representation of respondents' experienced well-being.

Data was also collected by random prompts over a period of time, with dozens of entries logged for each single respondent. This provides a more well-rounded representation of a person's overall well-being.

Two forms of well-being were measured in this study:

- **Experienced well-being**
A person's mood and feeling throughout daily life.
- **Evaluative well-being:**
Someone's perception of their life upon reflection.

Both forms of well-being increased with higher incomes, but **evaluative well-being** showed a more drastic split between the lower and higher income groups.

The Results *(Measured in Standard Deviations from Mean)*

Annual Income	Well-Being (Experienced)	Well-Being (Evaluative)
\$15,000	-0.21	-0.34
\$25,000	-0.11	-0.32
\$35,000	-0.09	-0.19
\$45,000	-0.06	-0.15
\$55,000	-0.05	-0.07
\$65,000	-0.03	-0.04
\$75,000	-0.01	-0.02
\$85,000	0.01	0.03
\$95,000	0.03	0.01
\$112,500	0.04	0.08

[Previous](#)[Next](#)

Why Does Money Buy Happiness?

The report warns that any theories behind why happiness increases with income are purely speculative. However, it does list a few possibilities:

- **Increased comfort**

As someone earns more, they may have the ability to purchase things that reduce suffering. This is particularly true when comparing low to moderate income groups—larger incomes below \$80,000/year still showed a strong association with reduced negative feelings.

- **More control**

Control seems to be tied to respondents' happiness levels. In fact, having a sense of control accounted for 74% of the association between income and well-being.

- **Money matters**

Not all respondents cared about money. But for those who did, it had a significant impact on their perceived well-being. In general, lower income earners were happier if they didn't value money, while higher income earners were happier if they thought money mattered.

Whatever the cause may be, one thing is clear—Biggie Smalls was wrong. Looks like more money doesn't necessarily mean more problems.

=====

Jack Bailey's 1/3 Scale B-17G. Best of All it Flies



https://www.youtube.com/embed/E-1_JwIHO-8

The story starts out back in 1999 with him and his buddies having a few beers and bench racing about what kind of mechanical project they should build next. Jack and his buddies are into planes and flying them. Soon after Jack went researching detailed plans of RC B-17's.

He found and ordered up 1/9 scale RC model plans and got to building. He upscaled and hand built each and every part. 17 years later, he had built a 1/3 scale B-17.

The aircraft is a four-engined, retractable conventional landing gear equipped, low wing monoplane. The fuselage is all riveted aluminum in construction with hexagonal bulkheads.



Bally spent nearly 18 years and an estimated 40,000 man-hours building the bomber, which he named "Obsession." The aircraft—known as the Bally Bomber—flew for the first time in 2016 and made its public debut at AirVenture 2018.

U.S. Army veteran, retired carpenter and experimental aircraft builder Jack Bally Sr. passed away in June 2020 at the age of 79.

=====

A 360 Degree Marscape

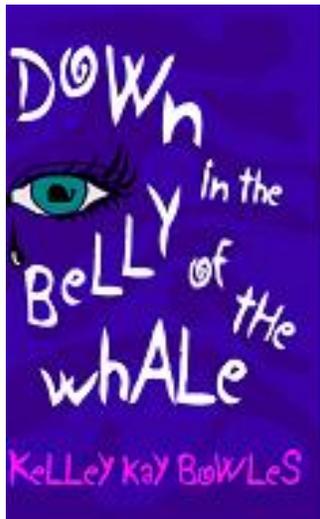


<https://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap210309.html>

Take your time with this. It is truly stunning

=====

Writer Friend Kelley Bowles on Dealing with MS



[Kelley—shown here with some of her books-- is an accomplished author of Cozy Mystery and Young Adult novels. We met on a ZOOM writer's class this past year. In her book, [Down in the Belly of the Whale](#), she describes in acute detail the onset of MS in one of the characters, prompting me to ask her experience with the disease. Here's her response, which I found to be stunning]

How IS the MS? Hmm...

It totally sucks.

And it has given me EXPONENTIALLY more than it has taken. If that makes sense.

I haven't felt my hands or the bottom of my feet in 25 years, can't feel my heartbeat, which is weird if you're not a vampire. Have questionable bladder control on a good day, lose function in my left leg and right arm the second my body temp goes up, and my brain via MRI looks like so much Swiss cheese.

But I don't have much pain, which a lot of people with MS have a lot of. I have to take a nap daily, which I was able to do during my entire 20 years of teaching because of ADA laws, and now that I'm not teaching anymore the nap is part of my day here...always.

My first published piece was in an anthology called 'Teachers With the Courage to Give', and that happened because I was a regular speaker at the *Women Against MS fundraiser*, and the editor of that book was the keynoter.

I have ridiculous self-confidence, which I think you and I have discussed before, but also ridiculous amounts of empathy and compassion which I attribute directly to the MS. Well, maybe not ALL of it, but a big amount. Also gratitude, because as soon as I figured out I could keep myself above ground even with this disease, I just got so grateful.

So, like I said—it gives a lot more than it takes. Most days I can recognize and appreciate its gifts. Most days.

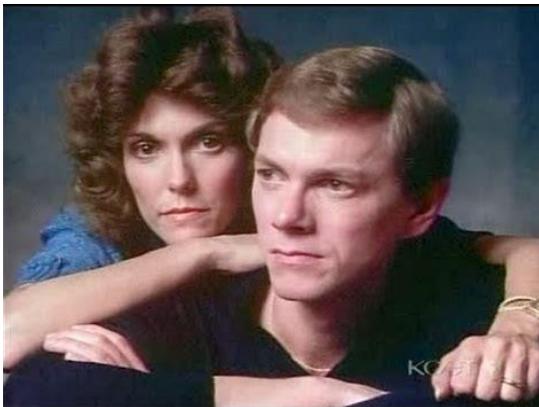
I used to talk about MS and me in my speech class as an example of an informational speech. So no questions are off limits!

[If you've a young adult—or an old one for that matter—in need of a great read (or listen as she performs on Audiobook), check her out her wares on Amazon.]

=====

Yesterday Music for Today

Remember the Carpenters?



Karen and Richard Carpenter's soft musical style, took full advantage of Karen's contralto vocals and Richard's harmonizing, arranging and composition talents.

They first performed together as the jazz-oriented Richard Carpenter Trio then as Spectrum. In 1969 they signed with A&M Records as The Carpenters whose music produced a record-breaking run of hit recordings in the soft rock, easy listening, and adult contemporary music genres.

Their career together ended in 1983 when Karen died from heart failure brought on by complications of anorexia. Dismissed for years as being too conservative, recently their music has attracted critical acclaim commercial success.

Rolling Stone ranked the Carpenters No. 10 on its list of the 20 Greatest Duos of All Time. Karen Carpenter has been called one of the greatest female vocalists of all time by Rolling Stone and National Public Radio. Paul McCartney has said she was "the best female voice in the world: melodic, tuneful and distinctive", while Herb Alpert said she was "the type of singer who would sit in your lap and sing in your ear".

Carpenters Greatest Hits Collection (Full Album)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr6oyNwpQCc>

We've Only Just Begun

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JgEptmz_eE

Carpenters, The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra – Superstar
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGrLUavkIA>

Carpenter biography
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reADsnIjNtA>

=====

Image of Endangered Orangutan Wins World Nature Photo Award

By Jaron Schneider



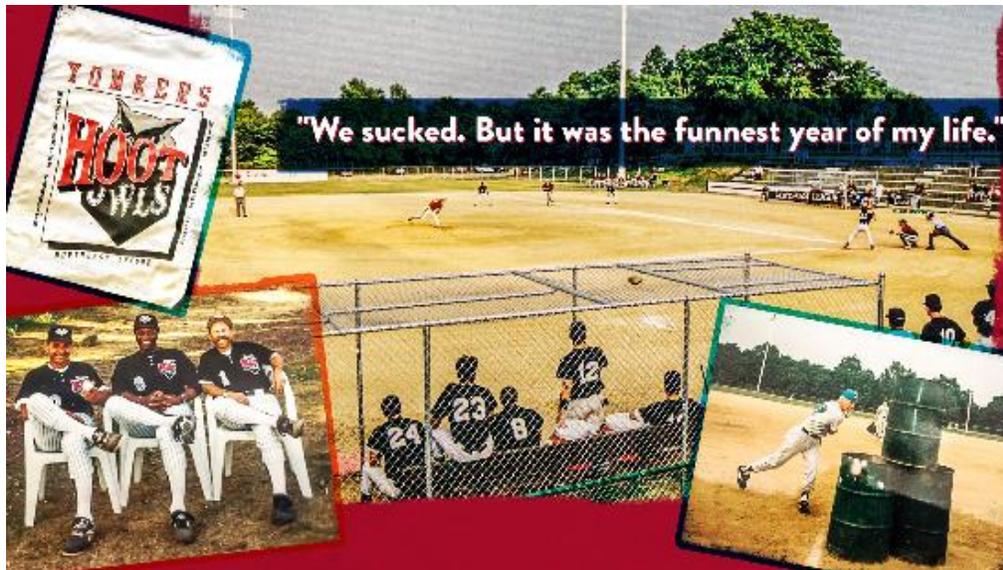
Photo by Thomas Vijayan

=====

Game Changers

We Found Them: They're the Worst Team Ever

By Anthony Castrovance@castrovance



Main photo via BallparkBrothers.com, Art by Tom Forget

The ballpark has no dugouts. It has no locker rooms. It has no restrooms, no concession stands and no scoreboard. No warning track lines its chain-link outfield fence. No plumbing routes run beneath its all-dirt infield or its spartan slab seats.

Set foot in the facility known as Fleming Field today -- in the shadow of the city water tower that blares the word "YONKERS" in bold blue letters -- and you would never know it actually housed a professional baseball team in 1995.

Then again, you would not have known it in 1995, either.

Fleming Field was the appropriately abysmal home of possibly the worst team in the history of paid play. They were called the Yonkers Hoot Owls, and their story is a lot like the movie "Major League" ... albeit without the uplifting arc or happy ending. In amenities, in attendance and in the independent Northeast League's standings, the Hoot Owls were dead last, then dead altogether. They lived for just a single, financially ruinous summer.

And yet, while changing into their uniforms in foul territory, mowing their own outfield grass and traveling to road games on a rickety school bus with no air conditioning, the Hoot Owls formed friendships and memories no record can reflect.

"We sucked," says first baseman Peter Bifone. "But it was the funnest year of my life."

This is a story about the lengths people will go to pursue their baseball dreams. It's the story of baseball in Yonkers. And what a hoot it was.

A League of Their Own

Independent leagues are where the undrafted, unnoticed or unwanted go to keep their baseball careers alive. They are landing spots for those who either exhausted their opportunity in affiliated Minor League Baseball (MiLB) or never had the opportunity in the first place. The independent Atlantic League has even been legitimized enough to become Major League Baseball's formal testing ground for various experimental rule

changes, and the American Association and the Frontier League have also become official partner leagues with MLB.

But the indy leagues we know today did not yet exist in 1991. That was the year the Professional Baseball Agreement (PBA) that governs relations between MLB and MiLB included a new series of facilities specifications for MiLB clubs. Standards were raised for the seating, playing fields, clubhouses, lighting systems, restrooms, etc. Minor League cities that were either unwilling or unable to perform the necessary updates lost their franchises to cities that would or could.

This development, combined with a strong spectator interest in pro baseball, made conditions ripe for the formation of new leagues -- beginning with the Northern League, which was launched in 1993 by former Durham Bulls owner and Baseball America publisher Miles Wolff -- that could tap into the country's thirst for the sport without being bound by the terms of the PBA. And the 1994-95 MLB strike provided added opportunity to get the attention of dissatisfied fans.

Enter the Northeast League.

Founded by a book publisher named Jay Acton, the Northeast was envisioned as a six-team league with a 70-game season, at a caliber comparable to Class A ball. All of the initial teams were located in New York state, and the 20-man rosters were mostly made up of college-age players and those cut from the Minor Leagues, with a few former big leaguers sprinkled in.

"We wanted to give the college kids that didn't make the Draft or were drafted and didn't make it another chance," says Larry Massaroni, a former Blue Jays scout who served as the league's director of player development. "Because it's hard to get a second chance in baseball."

Former Mets All-Star outfielder Lee Mazzilli was tapped as the commissioner. Team managers included former Indians skipper Doc Edwards (Albany-Colonie Diamond Dogs) and two members of the 1982 World Series-champion Cardinals -- pitcher Dave LaPoint (Adirondack Lumberjacks, based in Glens Falls, N.Y.) and infielder Ken Oberkfell (Sullivan Mountain Lions, in Mountaintale, N.Y.).

Yonkers' skipper was Paul Blair, the former All-Star outfielder and four-time World Series champion with the Orioles and Yankees.

"Everybody put their real-life experience into it," Massaroni says. "We all wanted to make it work."

The league wanted a team in Westchester County, near enough to New York City to garner media coverage. Because it falls within the territorial rights of the Yankees and Mets, Westchester had not had a Minor League team since 1949. But it was fair game to an independent like the Northeast.

Originally, the plan was to place Westchester County's team in Mount Vernon and to name it the Hoot Owls, with home games at Memorial Field -- the building where the famous Coca-Cola commercial featuring "Mean" Joe Greene was filmed.

Then a problem arose: Memorial Field, which had been built in 1930, was condemned by the city.

The focus shifted to Massaroni's hometown of Yonkers, where he had political connections. There was excitement about bringing pro baseball back to New York's fourth-most populous city, which had not housed such a team since a Hudson River League club in 1907. Adele Leone, a literary agent and associate of Acton's, paid the \$50,000 franchise fee to own the Yonkers club and wanted to name it the Blue Bandits. But some Yonkers City Council members, leery of the negative connotation of "bandits," shot that idea down. So against her wishes, Leone's team took on the nickname of the aborted Mount Vernon team.

The Yonkers Hoot Owls were born.
And quite the habitat awaited them.

Field of Nightmares

Fleming Field sits just eight miles north of Yankee Stadium, and no one would confuse the two. But with neither the funds nor the time to build a new facility, Yonkers didn't have much else to offer the Northeast League.

"It had the all-dirt infield and no water," Massaroni says. "There were a lot of restrictions to it. But it was a good ballpark in that you could seat a lot of people [with a capacity north of 1,000]."

Yonkers general manager Randye Ringler had the tall task of making Fleming Field palatable for professional baseball. An innocent victim of MLB's work stoppage, Ringler had been laid off from her position as the Mets' director of marketing a few months earlier. And prior to her 15 years with the Mets, she had been the assistant GM of Class A Charleston and the sales and promotions director for Double-A Memphis. So she had plenty of experience to draw from and contacts to utilize.

She'd need all the help she could get.

"Everything was done on the fly," she says. "It was not the way you want to run a team. But if you didn't have to worry about money or having a future career, it was quite the experience."

Fortunately, Leone sprung for lights, resolving one issue.

Mostly.

"The lights were so low," Bifone says. "If they hit a pop fly, you couldn't see the ball. Thank God for the infield fly rule."

The lack of plumbing created the need for portable toilets and some assistance on the maintenance front.

"My family were all firemen and policemen," Massaroni says. "So my cousin Hank provided water from the hydrants to wet down the field."

Folks in neighboring houses let the Hoot Owls use their spouts to fill up water coolers, which came in handy.

"That was a hot summer, and there was no shade," Bifone says. "After BP, we'd be drenched. So we're pouring the coolers on each other while changing before the game."

With no locker rooms and no fan barriers, changing was awkward.

"You'd try to have a friend stand in front of you," says infielder Brian Moeglin, "so you could put your sliding shorts and jock strap on."

It was much the same with the dugout, which was not dug but was very much out. All that separated the players from the fans was a chain-link fence. The Owls were caged.

"The positive spin on it," says coach Scott Nathanson, "was that you get to see the players in the dugout during the game! It was marketing, you see."

With no scoreboard, Ringler set up a dry-erase whiteboard on the outfield fence, "operated" by an intern. And because the ballpark wasn't located in the safest of neighborhoods, the whiteboard and all other signage had to be taken down after every game and hung back up the next day.

"They went through a lot of strip ties that summer," says LaPoint, the Adirondack skipper.

Adirondack played in Glens Falls' East Field, which had housed the White Sox Double-A affiliate in the early 1980s. It was a more typical indy league venue with locker rooms, a press box, a scoreboard and wraparound seating for up to 6,000 fans.

So when the Lumberjacks arrived at Fleming Field for their first visit, they were stunned. As if the field conditions weren't unusual enough, the Hoot Owls didn't even have the "L-screen" that batting-practice pitchers stand behind to protect themselves. While awaiting the delivery of a screen, the make-do solution was to stack one steel garbage can on top of two others.

"I told my guys, 'Boys, we won't be taking BP here,'" LaPoint says. "I'm 6-foot-3, and each drum was 3-foot tall. Those extra three inches are not where I want to get hit by a baseball."

With no groundskeeper, players tended to the outfield grass themselves, borrowing lawnmowers from their newfound friends in the neighborhood or from family members in the area. And while the all-dirt infield was not unique to Fleming Field (Japan's Koshien Stadium, used by the Hanshin Tigers of Nippon Professional Baseball, has the same), the Hoot Owls didn't have the proper equipment to rake it.

"We had some rough hops," third baseman/outfielder Drew Jemison says. "Lots of rocks."

To (literally) smooth things over, Ringler bought materials from a nearby Home Depot to make her own infield drag mat. And before, during and after games, she was often the one tending to the infield in her Easy Spirit pumps.

How did she keep her sanity?

"Who says I did?" she jokes.

The Bad News Owls

OK, so the setup was terrible. What about the baseball?

Well, not much better, unfortunately.

While the Hoot Owls managed to make many of their games competitive, they had trouble holding late leads and, perhaps as a product of their frustrating field, avoiding injury.

Their roster was largely comprised of locals. Guys like Jemison, who hailed from across the Hudson River in Nyack and didn't get drafted out of Mercy College.

"I had done a [Northeast League] tryout in the winter, and then, right before the season starts, I get a call that I made a team," he says. "We had maybe a week to go through practices. It was a ridiculous contract, like \$700 a month."

Ringler remembers some players making less than that -- closer to \$500 per month. A few were signed straight out of a tryout camp held shortly before the start of the season. The roster was raw.

(Multiple online sources list one-time Reds outfielder Leo Garcia, a native of the Dominican Republic, as a member of the Hoot Owls. But it's the wrong Leo Garcia. The Leo Garcia on Yonkers was from Tarrytown, N.Y.)

"I don't want to say 'rag-tag,' because we weren't rag-tag," Nathanson says. "But we didn't have the money to pay our guys what the Albany team or the [eventual league champion] Lumberjacks had."

One of the few members of the Hoot Owls with previous professional experience was Bifone. He had signed with the Padres as an undrafted free agent out of Bellarmine University in 1993, only to lose his spot in A-ball to first-round pick and eventual All-Star Derrek Lee. When Bifone heard about the Northeast League, he drove across the country, had a tryout and signed on the spot. He spent the next month working the phones, trying to sell tickets and sponsorships in advance of the opener.

"I'm calling all these local businesses," he recalls with a laugh. "Hey, this is Pete Bifone! We're playing baseball in Yonkers! Wanna buy a banner? What do you wanna pay? A hundred bucks? Deal!"

Because Fleming Field was not yet ready (and in truth, would never be ready), the Hoot Owls spent the first two weeks of the season on the road. Things started out well. On Opening Day at Adirondack, Yonkers scored some early runs and right-hander Mike Maerten threw a complete game in a 5-3 victory.

That night, as fireworks hailed over Glens Falls in a postgame celebration of the launch of the Northeast League, a teammate turned to Bifone and remarked how awesome the experience had been.

"Brother, don't get used to it," Bifone responded. "I don't think this is going to happen very often."

He was right. Though the Hoot Owls won a handful of games in the season's first month, reality caught up with them. They lost 15 in a row at one point.

"To be honest, the Hoot Owls could have won a lot of games," Massaroni says. "They just had no bullpen."

The vast experience Blair brought to the ballclub only went so far. Especially with Blair missing the season's opening series because of prior commitments, missing seven games because of a suspension for shoving an umpire and missing several other games because he was named the general manager of New Orleans' entry in the United League Baseball (a planned "third Major League" that folded before a single game was played).

But Blair, who passed away in 2013, was around enough to impart wisdom and provide context.

"I was sitting next to him one game, and he started calling out each pitch before it came through, just from watching the pitcher," Moeglin recalls. "I said, 'How are you doing that?' He said, 'That's the difference between where I played and where you're playing.'"

The roster constantly evolved. The Hoot Owls had a new right fielder just about every homestand. When a player was released after a game, he would hand over his uniform (Yonkers had only one uni, used for both home and away games) so that his replacement could wear it the next game. Players routinely fought through injuries out of fear of getting released or benched.

Those who managed to stick around formed friendships, some of which have lasted a quarter-century. They'd blow their paychecks at the Original Crab Shanty on City Island in the Bronx. They'd crash at the apartments of their teammates' girlfriends so that they could sleep in air conditioning. And because they were the Hoot Owls (and more accurately, because this was the summer of 1995), they'd sing along to the song that became their unofficial anthem -- [Hootie and the Blowfish's "Only Wanna Be with You"](#) - and alter the lyrics to reflect their record.

"We're only 6-22!"

For Love of the Game

Let the record show that the record is wrong.

Several online information portals -- from the ordinarily reliable Baseball Reference to the not-as-reliable Wikipedia -- peg the Hoot Owls to a final record of 12-52. But a search of newspaper records from that period reveal this to be a gross mischaracterization of their might.

They were actually 14-54.

Alas, even after this uptick in the win column, Yonkers is still left with an unsightly .206 winning percentage. It's not the worst in history. A search of Baseball Reference's database found 31 professional teams since 1900 (none from the Majors) who played at least 50 games and had a lower percentage. But the combination of faultiness with the field and futility on it certainly puts the Hoot Owls in some rare, rank air.

HootLineup



Art by Tom Forget

"I hate the fact that we might be remembered as one of the worst teams ever," Moeglin says. "That saddens me. Because as far as the people are concerned, it was one of the best teams ever."

They did go out on a heroic note, beating the Newburgh Night Hawks, 11-7, in the Aug. 31 season finale at Fleming Field by only giving up four runs in the bottom of the ninth. But by that point, it had become a foregone conclusion that the team would not be back for a second year.

Despite the Hoot Owls' effort to draw fans from all over Westchester County (their cap logo was a Y over a W, for "Yonkers of Westchester"), their very few wins had very few witnesses.

Northeast League teams went into '95 hoping to draw an average of at least 1,000 fans per game in order to be financially operable. Yonkers drew about 170 per game. (It didn't help that attending a game at Fleming Field required parking two and a half miles away and shuttling over.)

The insolvent situation got to the point where team owner Leone and league founder Acton, who comingled their funds, began dismantling the Hoot Owls before the season even ended. Acton showed up one day and fired most of Ringler's staff. Bifone, one of Yonkers' best players, was traded to the Sullivan team owned by Acton for three relief pitchers released by the Hoot Owls within days.

"We were so close-knit," Bifone says, "that guys [on Yonkers] were threatening to walk off the field to protest the trade."

Amid rumblings of Yonkers employees and contractors not being paid properly, John Purcell of the Glens Falls Post-Star caught up with Leone late in the season to address the financial concerns.

"Green [money] takes care of everything," she told him. "That's all I have to say, now run along."

But just a few weeks later, Leone, who passed away in 1999, admitted to The New York Times that her financial losses from the Yonkers investment were "considerable."

Are we really this snakebit?

"Initially, bills had been paid," Ringler says. "Only in the last couple months did we realize the money had run out. The team was supposed to be sold to make everyone whole, but the league played games with us."

The Hoot Owls were declared dormant. They were effectively replaced in the Northeast League in 1996 by the Bangor (Maine) Blue Ox, who went a respectable 46-33 with the help of none other than Dennis "Oil Can" Boyd. But the balance sheet did not transfer to the Bangor ownership. Any outstanding debts in Yonkers were allegedly ignored.

Nobody got burned as badly as Ringler. She had routinely put in 14-hour days for the Hoot Owls. She ran every aspect of the organization, from designing the team logo to ordering equipment to raking the field and faxing results to the league office after games. Ringler says she accrued about \$20,000 of team-related credit-card bills that went unpaid.

"When you're dealing with independent teams [at that time]," she says, "there's no governing body. You have nobody to appeal to."

Though four of the six teams from the Northeast League's inaugural year either relocated or folded, the league survived three more seasons. It then merged with the Northern League for four years and returned for the 2003 and '04 seasons before getting absorbed by the Can-Am Association, which is now merged with the Frontier League.

So the DNA of the Northeast League still exists, marking a somewhat successful run.

The Hoot Owls, though, were unsuccessful in every respect, and professional baseball has not returned to Yonkers -- or anywhere in Westchester County -- since.

(Well, except for a 2011 Can-Am team that was technically based at Westchester Community College but played every game on the road. They were called the New York Federals, and, not unlike the Washington Generals who perennially oppose and lose to the Harlem Globetrotters, they existed only to give the league an even number of teams and to develop players for the other clubs to pilfer. The Federals used 82 players in 93 games and went 15-78. But that's another story ...)

Still, while the Hoot Owls teach us so much about how not to build a baseball team, their members were a refreshingly pure example of devotion to the sport and to each other. In 1996, seven core Yonkers players, along with Nathanson, played together under Oberkfell on a new Northeast team, the Elmira Pioneers.

"It was the same league," Bifone says, "but a beautiful facility and host families and the way it should be run."

The stories from Yonkers, however, are what endure for Bifone (a college and high school umpire), Moeglin (a vice president in marketing), Jemison (owner of an embroidery business), Nathanson (managing in the independent Empire League), Ringler (who went on to hold various roles in horse racing, arena football, tennis and sports marketing) and others.

And there's one story that best gets to the heart of the Hoot Owls' experience.

The goal of the Yonkers players -- the reason they embraced their outrageous arrangement and the nightly comedy of errors -- was to reach the highest level their talent would allow. So in an effort to get her players the exposure they needed, Ringler called in a favor from a friend.

That friend was Joe McIlvaine, a longtime scout and executive who, at that time, was the general manager of the Mets. His words carried weight with scouts in the area. With McIlvaine's assistance, Ringler was able to arrange a midseason showcase, of sorts. A date was circled on the Hoot Owls' home schedule. As usual, there would not be many bodies in the stands that night, but this time the small audience would include a handful of big league evaluators, people whose recommendations could change a player's course.

It was all set up. One shot. Catch a break on this night, and all the oddities endured by the Hoot Owls would have been well worth the while.

But that, of course, was the night a lightning storm hit Fleming Field.

With the game called off, with the scouts scattered, with the players having returned to their humble homes, Ringler sat in the trailer that served as her office and had what was a recurring thought in that summer of '95.

"Are we really this snakebit?"

The answer, obviously, was yes. And that tragicomic twist worthy of Neil Simon himself perfectly epitomized a baseball team that was lost in Yonkers.

=====

