

FLATTMANN FILES

July 2024

“Quality Is No Accident”

SAFETY OVER SPARKS

Why I Left Fireworks Behind This Fourth of July

Ah, the Fourth of July — a time of joy, patriotism, and in my younger days, an excessive amount of fireworks. I used to be that guy, the one whose love for fireworks knew no bounds. But let me tell you, as much as I loved lighting up the sky, my enthusiasm has fizzled out a bit over the years.

Growing up in the '80s was a blast, literally. We were the kids who played outside from sunup to sundown, only coming home when we were hungry, or when it got too dark to see the ball. Those were the days when my friends and I, armed with a mischievous spirit, would tie up smoke bombs and drop M80 firecrackers into sewers. We were just curious kids, experimenting with fireworks, never anything harmful or cruel. That was our idea of fun, and it never seemed to get old.

Fast-forward a few years, and I'm an adult with my own house. That sense of adventure didn't wane — at least not initially. I remember on one Fourth of July, I went all out. I bought wholesale fireworks, more than I probably should have, which were rigged up with electronic detonators for what I anticipated to be the show of a lifetime. As the sun dipped and the air cooled (just slightly), anticipation grew. The kids buzzed with excitement, but the parents? We were a sweaty mess, trying to keep all those little ones entertained and safe on a hotter-than-heck South Louisiana day as the clock ticked slowly toward showtime.

The fireworks extravaganza was a success — a 10-minute display of dazzling lights and heart-pounding booms. It was spectacular, truly, but also utterly exhausting. By the end of it, parents were more drenched in sweat than impressed, and the cleanup? It took days to get my yard back to normal. As it turns out, the kids and even my wife weren't as passionate about fireworks as I was. It's not as much fun when you're the only enthusiast, and the fiasco of that overly ambitious holiday just sealed the deal for me.

I've finally managed to use up or give away my cache of unused fireworks, leaving only a few stashed under my stairs, a reminder



of my fizzled love affair with these explosive entertainers. Over the years, I've learned some lessons when it comes to fireworks safety, and I'd like to share a few this year. First, remembering how quickly a fuse can burn down, sometimes way faster than you anticipate, is critical, putting you dangerously close to the action. And let me tell you, quality assurance in the world of fireworks isn't always top-notch, which is why I switched to those electronic detonators. Even then, they can go off unexpectedly — good thing I can still run fast!

This year, my plans are much simpler: a low-key family barbecue. No zipline antics in the backyard — yes, we had one of those until recently — and definitely no elaborate fireworks shows. Just good food, cool drinks, and the company of my family. It's safer, easier, and honestly, at this point in my life, just as satisfying.

So, to all the fireworks enthusiasts out there, enjoy the spectacle, but remember to keep safety a priority. Sometimes, the best celebrations are the ones that leave only memories, not messes. Have a fantastic Fourth of July!



-Grady Flattmann



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LOBSTER TALES

The Culinary Odyssey of America's Favorite Crustacean

It may be hard to believe, but for much of our nation's history, you would be more likely to find lobster on the menu of a prison cafeteria than an upscale restaurant. For centuries, these crustaceans harbored a reputation as protein for the poor. In fact, lobster has only recently become a luxury item. This is the story of the lobster and how it rose from a side dish to the main course.

Seafood for Settlers

When settlers first arrived in America, they soon discovered the shores were teeming with shellfish, which the Native Americans often used as fishing bait and fertilizer. Lobster was so plentiful that settlers did not need to dive to catch them: They would simply pile up on the shore like produce at a grocery store.

The crustaceans, some weighing up to 40 pounds, were so prolific and cheap that it was the primary food for prisoners, workers, and children.

Servants ate so much that they got sick of them and reportedly included stipulations in their employment contracts that an employer would only serve lobster a maximum of two times per week.



Canned Crustaceans

While lobster became known as a ready food source for those living on the coast, its short shelf life made it inaccessible to those living farther inland. This all changed in the 1870s with the advent of canned foods and train travel, which made lobster even *more* affordable and plentiful nationwide. However, their affordability led to increased demand, which resulted in overfishing. Eventually, lobster numbers dwindled, and they became less accessible.

Shellfish Revival

In the 1920s, people yearned to taste lobster once more. This yearning only grew once chefs discovered that boiling the crustaceans while they were still alive helped to enhance their flavor — much to the lobsters' dismay. Restaurants in New York and Boston began serving lobster on their menu, but the increased demand and scarcity made them into the expensive treat we know today. Lobster's rise from bottom feeder to a top-shelf delicacy has changed the culinary landscape worldwide — the scrumptious shellfish is now a delicacy served worldwide.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, CASH

WHY REAL MONEY CAN'T TAKE CENTER STAGE

Have you ever wondered how moviemakers can afford to blow up piles of money on the big screen? It turns out that it's tricky, as the government has a set of strict rules to follow when studios feature U.S. currency on screen. So, roll out the red carpet because we're about to explore the laws of prop money.



Identical bills are illegal.

Prop money can't look identical to actual bills because of concerns about whether it could be circulated to the public and used. This happened after a "Rush Hour 2" scene where they blew up billions of dollars in prop money. Extras took home some of the fake cash and tried to use it in Las Vegas. The Secret Service got involved immediately, shutting down the shoot and confiscating the bills. If the money is a replica, it must be either 75% smaller or 150% larger than real bills. One of the most common methods studios use is printing only one side of the fake money. The design can also be altered slightly, like changing the shading or picture.

Real cash can't be destroyed.

Even though blowing up or burning money on camera can pump up the action for the audience, legal tender *cannot* be destroyed

in movies. Anyone can be charged with a federal crime, punishable by 10 years in prison and fines for destroying money. Only the Federal Reserve has that power. Technically, it's illegal to even flatten a penny.

You can't print money.

Real currency is printed on a unique blend of cotton and linen available only to the U.S. government. Prop money can't feel like the real deal. It has to be on paper and printed at a lower resolution. Robert De Niro didn't like how the prop money felt in his hands while filming "Goodfellas." To get around it, the prop master withdrew money from his bank account for De Niro to use. At the end of each scene, no one could leave until all the money was counted and returned.

So, next time one of your favorite movie characters has cash to burn, remember, those are fake bills in the flames!

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FLIGHT PATH FALLOUT

TAYLOR SWIFT’S JET-TRACKING TROUBLES

When pop megastar Taylor Swift travels anywhere, the whole world seems to hang onto every detail. It’s all made possible by information technology student Jack Sweeny, who has been tracking her private jet and posting all the details online.

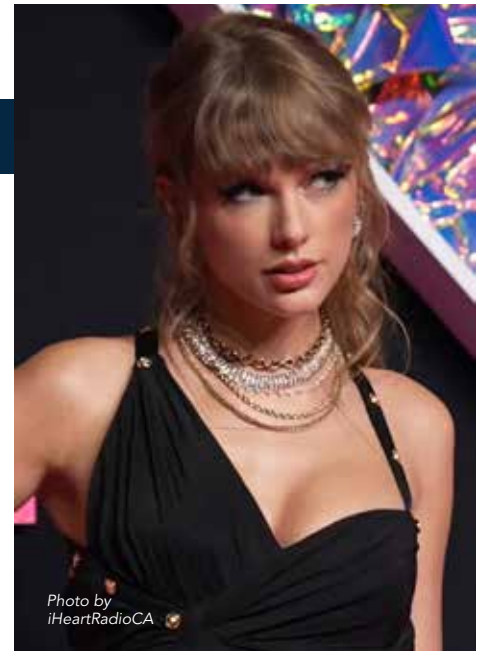
Swift’s lawyers sent the Florida student a cease-and-desist letter in December 2023, claiming he was providing “individuals intent on harming her, or with nefarious or violent intentions, a road map to carry out their plans.” The star’s team also stated that the timing of stalkers seems to correlate with Sweeny’s posts about her flights.

Sweeny’s site, GRNDCTRL, and social media accounts source public data from the Federal Aviation Administration on the flight details of billionaires, celebrities, and other public figures like Elon Musk, Kylie Jenner, and Bill Gates. He also gets information on the fuel usage and

emissions produced by private jets, which he shares online.

Though Sweeny said he never intended to cause harm to Taylor Swift or any of the other celebrities he tracks, he is using public data available to anyone; he’s just repurposing the information. His legal team said he was “engaged in protected speech that does not violate any of Ms. Swift’s legal rights.” Further, his lawyer claims Swift’s team has failed to prove the posts have led to stalking or harm of the singer.

Swift hasn’t been able to shake it off yet. Sweeny continues to post flight information for the singer, though he has switched to posting it on a 24-hour delay rather than in real time. The student has said he believes in transparency and has an environmental angle for what he is doing — he wants to expose the carbon emissions produced by Swift’s flights and those of other wealthy celebrities.



Swift’s team has taken no further action, and Sweeny’s lawyer said he doubted any more legal action would be taken. As for Sweeny, he suggested that if Swift really wanted her privacy, she could register her private jet with an anonymous corporate entity and choose an ID code that is not her birthday and initials.