

All the Legal Weirdness That's Fit to Print (Part 2)

Contributed by John Browning
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Last week, I brought you a roundup of some of the legal system's recent strange cases, criminals, and litigants. As the following cases demonstrate, there's a lot more where that came from.

Crime Doesn't Pay, And Neither Does Being a Celtics Fan

Eric Torpy is a Boston Celtics fan—a big one. So big, in fact, that when he was going to be sentenced in 2005 for the armed robbery of a pizzeria during which 2 employees were shot, he asked the judge to do him a favor. Torpy, facing a 30 year prison sentence, asked the judge to add 3 more years, so that his 33 year sentence would match Larry Bird's jersey number. The judge was only too happy to oblige. Now older (Torpy turns 33 this year), presumably wiser, and not eligible for parole until—you guessed it—2033, the convicted felon and rabid Celtics fan is having second thoughts. "I've wisened up. That three is a big deal, you know? Three years matters," he says.

We Need More Judges Like This

A 25 year-old Spaniard, with a law degree no less, recently took his parents to family court in Malaga after they cut him off financially unless he tried to find a job. The young man, who was living with his parents, sued them demanding that they provide him with a monthly allowance of 400 euros. But he found no sympathy from the judge, who ordered him to "leave home and get a job." In Spain, which suffers from over 20% unemployment (even higher among youth), it is common for grown children to still live with their parents. In fact, there have been several other cases of young men suing their parents for allowance money in Spanish courts. The judge ruled that the 25 year-old in question had "sufficient ability to work" and needed to learn to stand on his own two feet. Now if only I could talk to that judge about my brother . . .

A Case for Justice Felix Frankfurter, Perhaps?

Jim Andrews owns a hot dog restaurant in Chicago, and he's literally making a federal case out of a sign for his establishment. The city and Alderman, Bob Fioretti, don't like the name of his business and have withheld permission for a sign for the restaurant. The hot dog emporium is called "Felony Franks," and Andrews' chosen sign features the shop's logo, a cartoon hot dog in convict garb with ball and chain. While Andrews feels the design is inoffensive and an exercise of his free speech (he also says he provides jobs for ex-cons), Alderman Fioretti says the sign "just doesn't fit in" with the city's aesthetics. He also says the name is inappropriate, and makes light of crime. Personally, I think Fioretti's excuses don't cut the mustard; Chicago residents deserve the chance to try a "misdemeanor wiener."

A Lawsuit That Passes the Smell Test

The University of Colorado has filed a lawsuit against a toilet paper manufacturer and supplier, blaming them for more than \$40,000 in plumbing damages, including "bubbling and flooding in 27 academic and research buildings." I've heard of students complaining about toilet paper quality before (hey, you can always get two-ply), but this is the first time I've heard of the college itself raising a stink. Whoever prevails in the courtroom will no doubt be flush with success.

I Can See the Lawsuit Coming . . .

In many lawsuits, the key element is whether or not the accident was foreseeable or not. That may not be an issue with the collapse of a building floor in 2010 in Vaxjo, in southern Sweden. The building was the site of the meeting room for the local Weight Watchers chapter. A group of approximately 20 members had gathered to compare readings on the scales, when the floor suddenly collapsed. According to one eyewitness, "We suddenly heard a huge thud—we thought it was an earthquake and everything flew up in the air. The floor collapsed in one corner of the room and along the walls." Luckily, no one was injured, and the weigh-ins continued in a nearby corridor (bruised egos don't count). A floor collapses at a Weight Watchers meeting—insert your own punchline here.

Let's Hope This Isn't a Trend

Here in the U.S., it's become almost routine to see lawyers competing in (and sometimes even winning) reality shows like "Survivor," "The Bachelor," "The Apprentice," "The Amazing Race," and others. But in India, one of the top-rated TV shows features nothing but lawyers. On "The Firm: Corporate Law in India," viewers are treated to a half-hour news and discussion program in which corporate lawyers talk about their work, technical details and all. The 3 year-old show is the top rated in its timeslot, and it frequently includes American legal figures as well, such as former SEC chairman Harvey Pitt and Harvard Law professor

David Wilkins. The show frequently examines and compares Indian law and regulatory structures with their Western counterparts. But even though CNBC has an affiliation with the channel offering this show, don't expect to see an American version hit our airwaves anytime soon. After all, don't we get enough of lawyers as it is?