

Thankfully Adrift in a Haze or Three

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 21 November 2012 21:15

It gets harder to concentrate, the closer a holiday comes. For lack of a better term, I call this the Haze Factor -- that inverse relationship of decreased work focus and attention span with the increased nearness of friends, family, free time, and fun.

If the Haze is conjuring up banks of fog moving through your area, and/or your own mind, welcome to the club. (For my part, it's taken ten minutes to write three sentences.) With everyone likewise debilitated today, we'll attempt only one bit of serious business here, then amble over to a transition piece, and finally wander up to the sideboard of those fluffy meringue and cream pies, and puff pastries.

There's hardly a handful of calories in any of these things, so graze away, even as the Haze steals your gaze away from your work and that *whatsit* you were just thinking of, and now can't quite grasp or seem to get back.

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Hostess: We've already flayed here the executives who have systematically stripped riches from the company for themselves, and at the ongoing expense of workers -- all while blaming the unions, actively burying the company in debt, walking away from pension obligations, and other legal behaviors that would normally be considered frauds and swindles, if you or I tried to carry them out.

You may be interested in hearing what a baker's union member has to say about this sorry state of affairs, and ride along on some of his recent experiences, including writing a piece for CNN Money, and a guest shot on CNBC.

Mike Hummell paints the compensation picture clearly. In 2005, he was making \$48,000 a year before Hostess first filed bankruptcy. The reorganizations cut his pay to \$34,000 last year. The current contract would have shaved his pay further, to \$25,000 -- with a big jump in out-of-pocket insurance costs at the same time.

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It's a Bain-style, gut-strip-and-filet move. Mitt Romney and all capitalists will tell you they look for troubled companies they can help back up on their feet. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Capitalists' only interest is capital -- not workers, not patriotism, not what may be best for the country or the long term. Just money, what they can squeeze out for themselves, and at any cost. *Any cost at all.*

As such, vampire-vulture capitalists actually seek out healthy companies they can then load up with debt, even from the company's purchase. Then, they start to methodically strip out all assets, dismissing all debts via bankruptcy, and hanging pension obligations around taxpayers' necks, or else, just leaving them groaning, wherever they fall.

Capitalists like Romney and the execs at Hostess always enjoying posing as job creators -- the latest obfuscating buzz phrase for what they do -- while driving stakes through the hearts of companies, workers, and anyone else who gets in the way.

It's legal. It's easy money. It makes corporate cannibals overnight millionaires. And, it won't stop until a number of laws are changed.

Investing in America, as an idea, is just so out of date, with an ancient-seeming 1950s sensibility, to corporations now. Why bother building something up over decades, when you can make a thousand times more by tearing something down in just months?

Job creators and flag-wavers, good-guy and patriotic posers: This is what they like to be seen as, while actually running economic chainsaws through employees and families, stiffing third-party suppliers, abandoning pension fund obligations, and blowing debts out the back door via bankruptcy.

Somehow, these actions always appeal to right-wingers who see nothing at all wrong in ramming it to employee pension funds, long after the employees' work has been done, and this part of employees' pay is stolen, right out from under them, in a legal mugging.

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These are corporate parasites who infest healthy companies, sniffing out ways to take them down at whopping profits. They have their jaws around Hostess now. Your company may be next.

Be very glad Romney did not win the election, or the Baining of America would have only increased its speed by a hundred-fold, by five hundred-fold, and by more. Out-of-control investment vehicles tend to pick up speed as they roar and fly downhill, then jump the curb and start taking out row after row of innocent, rank-and-file folks.

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Looks like the last-ditch talks are done, as is Hostess, as are Twinkies and all the rest. With any luck, we'll remember this episode for the Baining the company took at hands of so-called management, and not for the "greedy unions" cover story the media all appear to love and repeat. Mitt must be very proud right now.

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Speaking of the Mittster, he was recently spotted -- *gasp!* -- pumping his own gas in La Jolla, California. There's a pic at the link below. The normally starched-and-factory-crisped Mitt looks like he was either coming off a 3-day bender, or else taking part in a failed clothing test for the Dry Cleaning Council.

Perhaps the 2012 Mittbot cyborg that was usually wheeled out and fronted during the election campaign had to go back to the shop for a tune-up, or for a 100,000-lie warranty service.

Look for a new book in Spring: *One Man's Suburban Wilderness Nightmare: Pumping My Own Gas!* On the bright side, Mitt, you can probably milk this one for another half million bucks in speaking fees. Just so long as you didn't drive off with the
-- *you didn't, did you?!*

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And of poetic justice, not to mention getting enough irony in your diet, it appears the Mittster will end up with 47% of the popular vote. Hoist on his own set of 50-thousand-a-plate fundraising leotards, I'd have to say. Such are the savory moments of inexplicable magic somehow still available in America today.

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You've successfully made it past the dry, over-prepared, photo-ready, debate-prepped, investor-grilled, movie-prop-quality turkey. Congratulations and holiday huzzahs. Now, as promised: *On to the desert cart!*

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How often have you run into birthday cakes shaped like three bottles of beer chilling in ice? There's always the cake that looks like all the fine ingredients to any decent clambake, too. Or, for a real mind-blower, the cake that looks for all the world like a big bundle of asparagus.

There's 11 cakes in all that look like almost anything *but* cakes, over at MentalFloss.com. The link's down below, with all the rest.

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In Ethiopia, there's a sort-of cupcake war underway. Other foods, too. These are the restless signs of a growing middle class wrestling with modernity. It's a fascinating look at foods and changing ways. (I can't stop thinking about the Caribbean Breeze, although Red Velvet could be good, too.)

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Denmark's experiment with the world's first "fat tax" is now over, after a year. The tax had been placed on foods high in saturated fat. Apparently, the attempt to help public health inflated food prices and put Danish jobs at risk. A tax on sugar had been in the works, but is now being scrapped, too.

Another case of the road of unintended consequences being paved with people having a fat- or sweet-tooth. *Or something.* Sorry -- it's the Haze Factor again.

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A little something for those who closely monitor their body weight: **breathable chocolate**. Even better, it comes with a fine name:

Le Whif.

The folks at NPR's sandwich blog recently took the brown plastic tubes out for a test snort, with amusing results. This lends a whole new meaning to inhaling one's chocolate too fast.

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And for those hoping for hybrids of chocolates and fruits, there is -- *tah-dah!* -- the chocolate persimmon.

Whoo

ps. ☐ Hang on. ☐ Spoke too soon.

Appears to be so named because the otherwise-monickered maru persimmon, when ripe, has brown flesh when you bite into it. (All right, my apologies -- sorry I brought the whole thing up.)

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To make that last one up to you, perhaps I could get you a Mobius bagel?

This one's from the files of one of my NPR Radio Lab heroes, Robert Krulwich, a long-time science writer with a unique and always-fresh sense of humor. If you don't mind a little intrepid bagel surgery, lots of crumbs, the potential for applying equal amounts of cursing or cream cheese, this one's for you.

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Finally, what's a big dinner without a flop on the couch, staring into a screen of one sort of another while blurring in and out of reality?

Here's a few goodies from the *odds-n-ends* tray -- one's a kind of mystery, and one is just plain mysterious, even after you know what's going on. Well, come to think of it, that probably fits all of them. Then, there's a third one that is... well: Happy to leave all that sorting-out up to you.

The first maintains itself to be *Finnish Underwater Ice Fishing*, complete with video. Krulwich is involved again here, so all is likely not what it seems. Before reading the whole story -- don't scroll down too far -- simply look at the video, and see if you can make out what's going on here.

(Being stuffed and in a post-food stupor is actually a pretty good start for enjoying this one -- although you'll probably pick up what's going on anyway, right off the bat.)

The other two short videos involve *meat*, in case you're already weary of turkey. (Buck up, good diners, and be of good cheer -- there are still many days of fine leftovers ahead!)

One is a genius-level sci-fi play that runs 7:23, and is based on a short story by Terry Bisson. It will leave you with many permanent questions, and favorite lines, no doubt -- but no long-term harm. Nice end title music by Bob Reynolds, too. The title of this video adventure: *They're*

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Made Out of Meat

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The other video dazzler runs 5:36 and is a brilliant, hashed-up mash-up that features a Carl-Sagan-and-Cosmos-style episode. Behold: *The Meat Planet* -- blink, gape, and jaw-drop in wonder and utter amazement!

Laughing is good for the soul, and it burns a couple calories, too, I hear.

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And, as a final holiday bonus, there's a wild image and a short story. Imagine being able to say this about your own job, and then laughing, as this person does: *My job's the worst, because usually you catch on fire.*

Pondering that one, I'm really feeling that Haze coming through about now -- or else it's that third piece of pumpkin pie, sitting happily, making me think of a nap.

A union member's view of Hostess: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/11/20/1163262/-Hostess-Workers-are-Winning>

Stick a fork in them, they're done: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20435345>

Mitts pumps gas: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/11/20/1163367/-BREAKING-Mitt-Romney-falls-back-to-Earth>

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The 47% Mitt watch: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/11/20/1163485/-Mitt-Romney-47-percent-watch>

And another angle of view: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/post/poetic-justice-romney-likely-to-finish-at-47-percent/2012/11/20/8a84ad4e-3351-11e2-9cfa-e41bac906cc9_blog.html?tid=pm_pop

Flashback: The 47% speech: <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/watch-full-secret-video-private-romney-fundraiser>

Cakes with identity issues: <http://www.mentalfloss.com/blogs/archives/112830>

Ethiopian cupcakes: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20266225>

Fat tax: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20280863>

Breathable chocolate: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2012/11/19/165484370/sandwich-monday-breathable-chocolate>

Chocolate persimmon: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2012/11/08/164696316/tracking-the-elusive-chocolate-persimmon>

Mobius bagel: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/krulwich/2012/11/08/164682556/mathematically-challenging-bagels>

Underwater ice fishing: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/krulwich/2012/11/10/164817715/finnish-underwater-ice-fishing-mystery>

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[y-finally-solved](#)

They're Made Out of Meat: [note: a brief, background F-bomb is at the 3:39/3:40 mark]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaFZTAOb7IE>

Meat Planet: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZP7K9SycELA&feature=related>

Bonus: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/12/methane/lavelle-text>