

LEISURE & ENTERTAINMENT

Where the Bottom Line is the Headline

By Vengrai Parthasarthy

To generate puns which are often dismissed as verbal dross, one must have a liberated mind. The puns have to be clever, witty and apt. If a good lather is half the shave, a good headline is half the story. It ignites the readers with a catchy introduction. Something which takes more than a few words to explain is compressed into a couple of expressions and that is not as easy as it seems.

Take a news item and try to unleash a pun; you will find that it is not easy. You have to "tell-all" succinctly. Puns and play of words are used more and more in newspaper headlines, magazines and advertising. Words are used to kindle the imagination, to set you thinking. Here is a selection, not a cross-section, of headlines which have transfixed me over the years.

A Berry Good Time Planned in Oxnard is the headline of a news item on the annual strawberry festival.

Canines Put Teeth Into Laws, Sometimes Into Lawbreakers is about police dogs trained to track criminals. The connection between dogs and bites is obvious and the use of "teeth" is rather apt.

Sweet Praise For Suite Software is a story about "suite" bundles that integrate groups of standalone software programs vis-a-vis integrated software which combine several functions. **He's Meek in Name Only** is an item about basketball player Eric Meek.

Subliminally, the headline speaks of Meek's combative skills.

Jones Turns Dallas Into Switzerland is a pun on the coach by name Switzer—a name which cries out to be punned.

Puffs of Cloud Worry Cuba Cigars is a self-explanatory headline of a news item of interest to cigar addicts. This item is followed by an interesting write-up on what Rudyard Kipling wrote on Habana Puro in his poem "The Betrothed." To a man who asked what he would do if his wife objected to Cuban cigars, Kipling was reported to have responded "Get a new wife!"

No Ifs, Ands or Butts is a headline which puts the right spin on the anti-smoking law.

Sometimes, it is the gourmet who provides an opportunity for the pun-maker to have a free run of his imagination. **Soufflé is a Piece of Cake** is the headline for the recipe for Raspberry Soufflé. Is soufflé really a piece of cake—yes in a manner of speaking, specially in a headline. **Lemon Aid** is about putting some juice into law to help the state's consumers. Actually this piece is not about lemon juice but about "lemons" which is a synonym for defective cars passed off as good and sound.

Margarita Wars Were Spirited is the headline for an article on tequila which is the prime "spiritual" ingredient of a popular alcoholic drink. The drink which was invented in the forties typically contains tequila, lemon or lime juice and a liqueur. The rim of the

glass is usually moistened and dipped in salt before margarita is poured. The contention of the tequila manufacturers was that margarita flavored drinks may not be the real thing.

Major Art Robbery Gets More Abstract is a story about one of the biggest art robbery cases getting prolonged.

Can You Dig This literally means can you fathom this? But this one is about archaeological experts flocking to Arizona state looking for finds.

Has the Bear Started to Growl? growls the headline writer amiably in a news item on the state of the stock market and the spreading gloom on Wall Street. **King Carl's Crown Still Gleaming** is about sprinter Carl Lewis who some felt, should be put out to pasture following his two un-Lewis like seasons. The writer underlines the fact that despite his touching 33 years, the crown on Lewis's head was still gleaming and that he can't be written off.

Sleepless in Lancaster is a parody of the movie *Sleepless in Seattle*. It has nothing much to do with amnesia but is a write-up on the Metro Link station. The report said that the timing makes many passengers bleary-eyed having to get up at an unearthly 2:30 in the morning.

How the Fallen are Mighty is a metaphorical mix up. It is about Stephen Lebeau who had gone from a team that won 24 Stanley Cups to one that had not won that many games.

One feels like snickering at this one: **Do Britons Mind Their P's and Queues**. Its a piece about the queue, that long-standing exemplar of British convention. The first-come-first-served tradition is under threat of being trashed. These days queue jumping is becoming more frequent in Britain and is considered a "great threat to our sense of stability and order."

Rhyme is another tool in the hands of the headline writer. **He's Lucky, He's Going to Kentucky** falls in this plucky category.

Tee and No Sympathy is the headline for Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan who had made privatization the centerpiece of his campaign. There was some opposition to his plans when he

went to golf in the Griffith Park course.

Some headlines do not roll off the tongue easily. **Pterodactyl Proves Ptops at Ball** is a break-jaw headline. The animal is pronounced with a silent P. That's why the chairwoman could capitalize on a claim the "Pterodactyl ptotally terrific ptops the Dinosaur Ball."

Bee Alert is a piece on precautions to be taken to stave off killer bees which were expected to invade California. That was a sweet pun, honey!

I'll conclude with one where the puns run amok. A vandal named William was looking for kicks and he drilled holes in a large signboard. He was caught and the headline read **Bored Bill Bored Bill Board!**

Chic Talk



Models showing the winter collections of Ritu Beri at a fashion show in New Delhi