

You can't make up this stuff

June 19, 2010

OK, kiddings, it's time for another edition of "Big Rob's You Can't Make Up This Stuff," the game based on my brother's theory that reality is stranger than any fiction you can conjure up. As always we begin with an item from Big Rob's stomping grounds of Flint.

The tallest building in downtown Flint is the 19-story Genesee Towers. It's been vacant and crumbling for more than a decade, but in the late '90s businessman Kumar Vemulapalli bought the building for \$500,000.

A previous city administration deemed the building as unsafe and, according to MLive, something called 'inverse condemnation through eminent domain,' ensued. Under this the owner was forced to sell the building back to the city, but because the sale was forced, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that Flint owes Vemulapalli \$4.9 million for the building, another \$1.2 million for legal and witness fees and \$2 million in interest.

The ruling also requires Flint to put the judgment on the tax rolls, so the treasurer is required to up the millage to a certain amount to cover the judgment. This could mean a \$500 special assessment on every business and residence in the city.

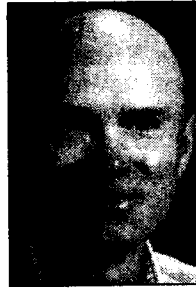
And when all this is over, guess what they plan to do with the building. Why, tear it down, of course.

How's health care in America working for you these

days? It's not working all that well for Kathy Myers of Niles, Michigan. According to ConnectMidMichigan.com, she injured her shoulder a month ago but was unable to see a specialist because she couldn't afford health insurance. "They told me I had to be in imminent danger in order to get treatment," she said. So Myers went home and shot herself in the shoulder. "That made it imminent danger," she observed.

Don't worry, in the words of John Wayne "it was only a flesh wound." She was released from the hospital a few hours later. The original shoulder problem is still untreated, but the prosecutor's office is going to decide whether Myers will face charges for firing a weapon within city limits. The good news is that if she's convicted and winds up in jail she'll probably have government-provided health care.

Have you heard about the website wikileaks.org? According to the Washington Post: "Its website doesn't list a street address or phone number, or the names of key officers." Officially, it has no employees, headquarters or even a post office box. Yet, about 30 times a day, someone submits a sensitive docu-



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ment to this cyber-whistleblower to be posted online for all to see. Politicians' private e-mails, secret CIA reports, corporate memos, surveillance video — all have been fair game."

The site says it wants to become "a global foe of excessive government secrecy and an enabler of citizen activists, journalists and others who seek to challenge the powerful."

The bottom line is that no person, government or corporation has been able to figure out how Wikileaks operates or who is in charge. This week, though, Defense Department investigators nabbed a 22-year-old Army intelligence specialist accused of leaking highly classified documents to the website.

This could be a futuristic, sci-fi thriller in real life, so you may want to keep tabs on developments.

You may remember the classic Rodney Dangerfield line, "Take my wife, please." This is now particularly true if you're a married man in Egypt. A new ruling in that country directs the Interior Ministry to strip citizenship from any Egyptian man married to a woman from Israel. It doesn't matter if the woman is Arab or Jew, either. If she's from Israel,

the husband's citizenship is history. The man now has to choose, stay married or be a citizen. This will make for some interesting spousal conversations, don't you think? Ladies, what would your husband choose?

Who said this about the state of affairs in Washington? "There is the uneasy feeling here that the machinery of government is creaking to a halt, that no one cares much, that things are out of control and no one is trying to bring them under control ... The automobile, housing, airline and savings industries are in terrible shape ... There are hearings and hand-wringings and posturings, but nothing is moving pertaining to the economy, unemployment, interest rates, or anything else of importance."

That's telling it like it is, you might say. However, if you guessed that any current political commentator made the remark you would be wrong. The quote is from a column by former Congressman Otis Pike writing for Newhouse News Service in 1982. Ronald Reagan was president. Republicans controlled the Senate. Democrats controlled the House. File this in the "the more things change, the more they stay the same" folder.

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