



Tuesday, December 29, 2009



GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

Great balls of fire. That's the classic [New York Post](#) headline under the mug shot of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who was detained by authorities after trying to detonate a package in his underwear on a flight bound for Detroit. Abdulmutallab packed 80 grams of explosives into a condom but was unsuccessful in his attempts to ignite it. Instead, the only thing he managed to set on fire was his crotch. The Post goes on to refer to the briefs in question as "jihad jockeys" and "frighty whities."

A Stunt Cyclist's Tour de Fence

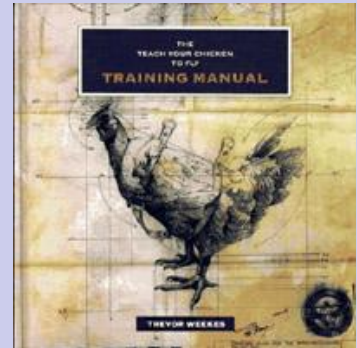
EDINBURGH — Like his fellow Scot Susan Boyle, who made a meteoric entry into show business, the stunt bicyclist [Danny MacAskill](#) can divide his life in two: before his YouTube video and after. Eight months ago, MacAskill's daily routine was fairly predictable. He would leave the apartment he shares with a roommate, hop on his bike and maneuver through strangling traffic to his job as a bicycle mechanic. Along his route, he passed a metal fence with a spiky top. He had eyed it for years. "I'd look at it and say, 'I can ride that rail,'" said MacAskill, 24. He eventually got up the nerve, and the subsequent 30-second trick — which took four days to shoot — became the jaw-dropping highlight of a [5-minute-37-second video](#) posted on YouTube in April. The video shows MacAskill on his bike, jumping over fences, walls and other obstacles; doing a back flip off a tree; riding the spiky fence; and performing other hair-raising stunts that could make him the toast of orthopedic surgeons everywhere. "I am more comfortable on my bike than I am on my feet," he said. The video was filmed over six months by his roommate, Dave Sowerby. It made MacAskill an instant inspiration to a generation of young cyclists. With more than 13 million views, it is the Top Favorited sports video in YouTube history, according to the Web site's statistics. Within days, MacAskill's life was upended. "Everything went crazy," he recalled recently over a pizza lunch. "I'd get up in the morning and be doing interviews while I was still in bed." ([Read Full](#)



[Story](#))

"Teach Your Chicken to Fly" and other weird and wonderful books

Thanks to Abe Books, an [online book room](#) has been created that is host to "everything that's bizarre, odd and downright weird." Based on material developed in 1940 for the Society for the Rights of Inferior Birds, Trevor Weekes' definitive guide will have your chickens flying free as birds should be. Using careful instructions, detailed diagrams and specially designed exercises to build up wing strength, Weekes guides you in training your chickens to take to flight. Also included in The Teach Your Chicken to Fly Training Manual are emotional anecdotes about flying fowl associations and training academies and a rare photograph of Gregory Peck, the first chicken



To Keep Home Fires Burning, Grab That Boa

WATERTOWN, N.Y. — The women arrived on time; they were, after all, Army wives. Gym-class demure in velour sweat pants, cotton T-shirts and dirt-smudged cross trainers, they looked ready for a Pilates workout. Until Amanda Knight slipped on a pair of blood-red high heels. And Charlene Jernigan pulled on shoulder-length satin gloves. And Jen McNeil wrapped a blue-and-white feather boa around her shoulders. Then Lily Burana, the instructor, cranked



up the music. Vintage Peggy Lee, circa 1966. So let me get right to the point. I don't pop my cork for every guy I see. Hey, big spender, spend a little time with me. Shoulders dipped, hips thrust, knees bounced, legs kicked, boa feathers fluttered. "One for Uncle Sam, y'all!" Ms. Burana shouted. There is a long and honorable tradition of military wives (and, these days, military husbands) going the extra romantic mile for spouses returning from war. A quiet weekend without the kids. Candlelight dinners. Some slinky lingerie. But striptease? Enter Ms. Burana, an exotic-dancer-turned-writer-turned-Army-wife who has endured her own deployment blues and is now trying to channel the cultural mash-up of her life into a morale-boosting quest. She calls it Operation Bombshell. [\(Read Full Story\)](#)

Teens discover new species of cockroach in New York City

Prep-school teenagers have put the "ew!" in "eureka!" Matt Cost and Brenda Tan discovered a potentially new species of cockroach as part of a high-tech urban DNA analysis project. Cost, 18, and Tan, 17, seniors at Trinity School on the Upper East Side, spent weeks scouring their Manhattan and Brooklyn neighborhoods for items with salvageable DNA for a genetic study hosted by [Rockefeller University](#).



They found the creepy critter -- which resembles the American cockroach -- dead and ugly in the basement of an Upper East Side apartment building. After they got its DNA sequence analyzed by the [American Museum of Natural History](#), the duo tried to match it with species recorded in two vast genetic databases -- but were shocked to discover that they couldn't. "It's exciting, because we think we might have found a different breed," said Tan. "It's genetically distinct from all the other cockroaches in the database," she said. The roach's DNA was 4 percent different than any other registered sequence, but within-species genetic ranges are typically less than 1 percent, according to the teens' mentor, Rockefeller University adjunct Dr. Mark Stoeckle. He said insect specialists would need to confirm the finding, which could ultimately grant the youngsters naming rights for the new breed. Under the same project, Tan and Cost were also able to determine that 11 of 66 household food items they analyzed were falsely labeled -- such as cheese made from cow's milk fraudulently packaged as sheep's milk cheese. Other mislabeled items included a "venison" dog treat that was made with regular beef and "sturgeon caviar" that was really Mississippi paddlefish. The food analysis followed a similar study by Trinity students last year that found that one-quarter of the fish the kids purchased at restaurants and markets had been mislabeled -- often by replacing expensive fish with cheaper species.

Officer says he's blessed that his badge saved his life

OAKLAND, TN - This story gives new meaning to the phrase badge of honor. After all, it is a badge that is credited with saving Oakland Police Officer Joshua Smith's life, after a man shot him at point-blank range. "It felt like someone hit me in the chest with a baseball bat," Smith said, speaking out for the first time since the shooting on Christmas Eve. "I couldn't breathe, I couldn't catch my breath. At that point I was worried about finding a wound and stopping the bleeding," Smith said. But there was no wound, and there was no bleeding, thanks to his steel badge. Officer Smith says it all started at one in the morning Christmas Eve when he spotted a car weaving wildly on Highway 64 in Oakland.



He pulled the car with an expired temporary tag over and ordered the driver to get out for a field sobriety test. The passenger also got out, and swung a knife at Smith. As Smith subdued the passenger, the driver pulled a gun out and shot Smith at point-blank range. "As soon as the shot happened and I fell back, I was thinking, defend, defend, defend," Smith said. Smith fired back, the driver screamed, and they took off. Smith says doctors told him, without his badge, the wound to his chest could have killed him. ([Video](#))