

IS CHRISTMAS OVER YET?

I hope you got everything on your Christmas wish list. Where are you keeping your new cinderblock-size box set of “Mozart: The New Complete Edition,” with 240 hours and 4,000 tracks on 200 compact discs (including some pieces attributed to Mozart but not definitively his and his alone)? How about that big thumpin’ John Deere toy earthmover that flips over and turns into a shark? Or did you succumb to martyrdom and run a marathon or take the ice bucket challenge instead of giving yourself or someone else a nice gift of cash OR “Hamilton” tickets? This holiday season, I realized I prefer Thanksgiving over Christmas, because Thanksgiving is simple: eat, drink, and be merry with other people. No gift-giving anxiety involved. How sweet it is.

A MIND LIKE A FINE WINE

As we age, our minds tend to become less focused, but scientists say that is actually a good thing because then we become more creative. A review of 100 studies recently published in the journal “Trends in Cognitive Sciences” concludes that distractibility (the boys and girls in white lab coats call it “decreased cognitive control”) is associated with greater “original thinking.” Innovative ideas suggested by study participants: use a hair dryer to blow leaves, a tennis racket as a snowshoe, a broken chair for firewood, a baseball bat as a rolling pin. “Older adults are experts at picking up information and using it in new situations to improve their performance,” says Dr. Lynn Hasher, University of Toronto psychology professor and senior author of the cognition

study. (Source: “The Benefits of Being Distracted,” by Sumathi Reddy, Wall Street Journal, November 29)

QUARRY QUERIES

Thanks to Jane Northrop for her detailed explanation in the Tribune (December 14) about what the Rockaway Quarry project manager John Zentner plans to do with the property now that the residential proposal (Proposition W) failed in the November 8 election by about 2 to 1. Zentner says he will now focus on mine reclamation and building a mitigation bank. I confess that even though I read Jane’s story at least twice, I couldn’t very well understand what mine reclamation and mitigation banks are, so my distracted “older” mind turned to thoughts of what really might make sense in the poor old shopworn quarry, which has been at least three times to the altar and yet remains unmarried. Lacking focus and controlled cognition, I imagined an orphan team like the Oakland A’s or the Oakland Raiders coming to town and building a sparkling new stadium on the old rockpile. Also, since California voters legalized recreational marijuana, how about developing a gonzo revenue source for our cash-strapped city, growing premium Quarry Buds? But my mind always wanders back to the good old days, wandering and wondering why no one ever built a casino, a bordello, and/or a boating marina in that dang hole in the ground.

SWAMI SEZ

“The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything.” (Joseph Stalin)

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